

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

CHAPTER 15

Consummated

His Story

When that end cometh, we shall read . . .
the whole of God's purpose as one grand poem,
and there will not be one verse in it that has
a syllable too much, or a word too little; . . .
much less one that is erased,
but from beginning to end we shall see
the master-pen and the master-mind drawing forth
the glorious array of majestic thoughts.

CHARLES H. SPURGEON

*W*hen you go to a stage play, an usher usually hands you a bound program—a booklet—as you enter the theater. It's called the playbill, and it gives you a summary of the story you're about to see dramatized. With the help of a nice lady with a little flashlight, you find your row and your seat. And then, because you're early, you have time to do some reading.

You open the playbill. As you turn the pages, you learn who designed the set, something about the actors and actresses—

who they are, where they're from, their accomplishments—and (especially helpful if you happen to be watching an opera in a language you don't speak) a synopsis of each act.

You can't tell what a novel or a play is about, where it's heading, or how it ends by randomly opening it to a page somewhere in the middle. To get the whole story, you have to read the whole book or script. So it is with God's Story.



The Bible is your Playbill tonight. It's your behind-the-scenes guide to a Story that was written before time began, when the stage was set for the grand Production. It tells us what we need to know about the Designer, the players, and the story line unfolding, both on the stage of human history and in heaven above.

So, with your Bible in hand, the play begins.

The curtain rises. A hush falls across the audience. You scoot to the edge of your seat. You don't want to miss anything. The stage is dark and empty. The Story opens.

In the beginning, God created . . . (Gen. 1:1)

At this point we learn who the Narrator is . . . the One who will tell the Story. His is the Voice we'll hear from start to finish:

And God said . . . (Gen. 1:3)



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So it is with God's Story. The Bible has a beginning, a middle, and an end. This story line makes sense of our world and explains how we fit into God's eternal plan. It gives us a context, a grid through which to process hard things that come into our lives.

There are four main acts in this Story. Our Playbill tells us what to expect.

PART ONE

Act 1: Creation. God made this world—all of it, including the human race—to glorify and enjoy Him forever. He declared everything good and blessed all that He had created.

Act 2: Fall. Adam and Eve (and through them, all of their descendants) chose to rebel against this good God. The consequences of their declaration of independence were pervasive and tragic. The first couple were banished from Eden, the garden God had created for their pleasure. Their relationship with Him and with each other was fractured. The earth was placed under a curse—the curse of sin. Every form of injustice, hatred, violence, evil, strife, and abuse is borne out of sin in the heart, which ultimately leads to death. The brokenness caused by sin is seen everywhere in our world.

Intermission

PART TWO

Act 3: Redemption. Even before sin made its appearance, God set in motion a plan to reconcile humans to Himself and to restore

them to a place of blessing. He did so by sending His Son to this earth to live the sinless life we should have lived and to pay the price for sin with His own Life.

Act 4: New Creation. All of history is moving toward the capstone—the consummation—of His Story. Christ will return to this earth, bringing eternal judgment to His enemies and eternal salvation to those who belong to Him. He will create a new heaven and earth—free from all sin and suffering—and will reign forever without a rival.



In part one—what we know as the Old Testament—we see God’s people rebelling against Him. Time and again He extends His mercy and pardon. The people repent. But time and again they sin. Time and time again.

All along, God hints at the final two Acts. He promises to send a Rescuer, one who will perfectly fulfill the divine law that all of humanity has broken. One who will succeed where humankind has failed. One who will redeem our brokenness and fallenness and reconcile us to the Father.

We are given glimpses of this coming One throughout the pages of the Old Testament. He is (and was, and will be)

- the Offspring of the woman (Gen. 3:15)
- the Star of Jacob (Num. 24:17)
- the Prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15)
- the Commander of the army of the Lord (Josh. 5:14)
- the Kinsman-Redeemer (Ruth 3:9)
- the risen and returning Redeemer (Job 19:25)

- the Good Shepherd (Ps. 23:1)
- the Chief among ten thousand (Song of Songs 5:10 NKJV)
- the Sun of righteousness, risen with healing in His wings (Mal. 4:2)
- and so much more!

Yet year after passing year, the people wait, generation after weary generation. Where is He? When will He come? *Will* He ever come?



The theater lights brighten. We stand at our places, and intermission begins. But this is no ordinary interval.

This suspension of the drama lasts four hundred years. The stage stands dark and dormant. The Narrator is silent.

Prophets are no more. Priests continue their routines, but the promises of a new day dawning grow faint in their memory. God's people live through generation after generation of celestial blackout.

Then the lights in the vestibule flicker. The long wait is over. Part two is about to begin.

You return to your seat and look again at the Playbill. Somehow, you'd overlooked the name of the next act. Now you see it printed right there: *redemption*.

This is the act where God enters the story personally through the birth of an infant and brings it to a climax with a death and a resurrection. Though long foretold, these plot developments took everyone (except God, of course) by surprise. And they changed everything!

Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope—the weary soul rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!¹



Paradise (creation), *Paradise Lost* (the fall), and *Paradise Restored* (redemption and new creation)—these are the Big Ideas of God’s Story. But right now, we are living in a transition between *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Restored*. We still suffer

We still suffer from the effects of the fall, and so often it seems that evil prevails. But thankfully, through Christ, our faithful, all-powerful God is in the process of redeeming and making all things new.

from the effects of the fall, and so often it seems that evil prevails. But thankfully, through Christ, our faithful, all-powerful God is in the process of redeeming and making all things new.

There are pages and chapters in our lives that seem to make little sense. They may even seem heartless and cruel—certainly not the kind of Story a good God would write.

If we look only at the tiny slice of reality in which we live, we could conclude—as many do—that our world is hopelessly insane, and we are merely

victims of random fate or of a malevolent god who is unworthy of our trust and loyalty. For sure, we would have no reason for hope, peace, or joy.

But in God’s Word we find a backstory that shows us what once was and how things got to where they are today. And there

we discover a God who is faithful, whose Story cannot be thwarted, and who is always working to accomplish His good, eternal plan, using even twisted human actions and circumstances to bring glory to Himself in the end. And there we find promises of a bright and certain future that awaits us.



Do you ever find yourself reading a novel and wanting to skip ahead to the end to find out what happens? The plot is complex and scary, each page a nail-biter.

It seems the good guys are being overpowered and crushed by the bad guys. “How does this all turn out?” you want to know. You’re eager to find out whether and how the problems get resolved, the mysteries solved, whether there will be a happy ending.

Sometimes that’s what we want in life—to be able to look ahead and know what will happen. Will the Lord ever send me a mate? Will my marriage ever be happy again? Will my prodigal child return home? Will I be able to find a job? Will my sister survive this diagnosis? Will my elderly, unbelieving dad ever trust in Christ? What will my death be like?

We want to skip over the long, hard chapters, with all their pain and problems, and get right to the end. Of course, that’s not possible.

In His Word we discover a God who is faithful, whose Story cannot be thwarted, and who is always working to accomplish His good, eternal plan, using even twisted human actions and circumstances to bring glory to Himself in the end.

However, in His Word, God tells us just enough about the end of the Story to give us hope and courage to face what lies between here and there . . . now and then.

It's hard to overestimate the importance of a strong ending. A good conclusion makes all that has transpired meaningful. Otherwise, we're left disappointed.

Sometimes, the ending is not at all what you expected. Back when you were in school, you may have read some short stories by William Sydney Porter (1862–1910), better known by his pen name, “O. Henry.” His stories are set in his own day and often deal with ordinary people. Among his most famous stories is *The Gift of the Magi*, which has been retold in countless forms and variations over the past hundred years.

The signature feature of O. Henry's short stories is their surprise endings. *Whoa*, you think when you turn to the final page, *I didn't expect that!* And then, suddenly, everything makes sense. As the reader, you're rewarded for your patience and satisfied that the outcome is as it should be.

In the end, God's Story will be like that. It will be far better than anything we ever imagined, surprising and delighting all those who have trusted Him. But the end will also shock and terrify all those who thought they could ignore or defy Him and get away with it. It will be far worse than anything they ever imagined.

Denouement is a word I (Nancy) have loved since I first learned it in a high school literature class. It's a French word that refers to the final part of a story, the part where all the plot strands come together and everything is explained or resolved. It's usually the moment when everything becomes clear and the final outcome is revealed.

As the writer of a story, you don't want to give away all the developments of the plot too early. You want to keep readers

with you right up to the very end. Kind of like saving the biggest, brightest, and best fireworks for the end of the Independence Day show. Or Jesus making the best wine at the end of the wedding feast in Cana.

But the final act of God's Story will eclipse the ending of every other story ever told.



Deus ex machina is a term from ancient Greek theater that literally means “the god from the machine.” This device was sometimes used by ancient playwrights when they couldn't figure out how to resolve a complex or hopeless plot. They would use machinery to fly a “god” onto the stage, sometimes on a cloud, to solve all the problems and dramatically announce “The End.” Presto. *Fine*. Curtain down.

The term is now used to refer to the type of story ending “in which an outside force determines the outcome rather than the actions and decisions taken by the characters.”² At the last second, out of nowhere, something or someone suddenly appears, wipes out the bad guys, rescues the good guys, resolves the conflict, and fixes everything that is wrong.

Writing teachers agree that *deus ex machina* is *not* the way to end a story. It's considered lazy—a shortcut to solve complex problems and bring about resolution. And . . . it's just not plausible.

But this dramatic device gives us a sense of how God's Story will end. *Deus ex machina* reminds us of one of the most dramatic, climactic passages in all of God's Word. It's found near the end of the Bible and describes the outcome of the final battle when God will deal the decisive blow to all rebellion and unrighteousness.

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse!
The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in

You Can Trust God to Write Your Story

righteousness he judges and makes war. . . .

He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. (Rev. 19:11–16)

Talk about God (not “a god”) flying in to right every wrong on this sinful earth! This is the beginning of the ending—and then the New Creation comes to pass. All things are made right and new. Paradise is restored, never to be lost again.

This is the denouement of God’s Story—the satisfying ending and explanation to which we look forward even while we experience the suffering, loss, and brokenness of life in this “already, but not yet” state. This is the hope to which we anchor our souls. The promise on which we stake our lives.

Hallelujah! It is finished! Amen.

Come, Lord Jesus!