

A Beautiful Life Lesson 1: A Beautiful Life Originates in God's Eternal Story

One of my favorite lines in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy comes from the hobbit Sam. In case you aren't familiar, hobbits are ordinary folk in the land of Middle Earth—hard workers who enjoy the pleasures of home and good food. The problem is that Sam is miles from home in dangerous territory, accompanying his master, Frodo Baggins, on a trek to the heart of all evil—the land of Mordor. As he and Frodo pick their way through the dark and foreboding territory, he muses out loud, “I wonder what sort of tale we have fallen into.”

Hmmm....that's a good question! What tale have we fallen into? Or to put it another way:

What story are you living in?

This matters. Like Sam, we too have fallen into a tale. And the tale we tell, the narrative we live in, the worldview we have on life, will affect what we think, choose, pursue, and live.

Jesus tells us that there is only one narrow way—one true Story. Every other path the world offers may look pleasant, easy, or satisfying, but at the end will lead to death.

Thankfully, God does not leave us in the dark to try to find that narrow way. Through His Word, He orients us in the right direction and roots us so we can begin to understand our lives from God's perspective. He sets things up in Genesis and completes it in Revelation.

A beautiful life originates in God's Story. When we begin to understand this overarching narrative, then we can know right from wrong, good from bad, and better from best. If we do not, the culture's alternate narrative will shape us instead.

Not only that, we will understand that we are not just watching this story—we are living in it. Understanding God's Story as revealed in the Bible will also show us that we are not the center of the story but a player with a role. We'll recognize the real hero is not us but God. We are not the ones to save the world. It's not up to us. And when we get oriented properly, with our Trinitarian God as our focus, things will all fall in place.

Some people have it all—or so it seems—but they are still empty. I believe it's because their view of life—as rich as it is on earth—is actually not big enough. With God there is so much more. With God it is so much better. When we step back to look at life from the 10,000-foot panoramic view, things like suffering, wealth, family, time, whatever, all take on a new meaning. These become windows to a fuller and deeper reality. They are only shadows to the real thing that is so much greater.

Therefore, to live a beautiful life, we need to pull back the curtain to let God unveil what He is doing. Then we can fit our little lives into that overarching Story—and there find our purpose in living. That is where we will find a life of fullness, not emptiness.

As with all stories, there are themes, main ideas that run through the entire work, hinted and developed throughout the characters, the events, and the setting. This is so with the Bible as well. One of these themes is the idea of the Kingdom of God.

Graeme Goldsworthy describes the kingdom of God as “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing.” In his book, *God’s Big Picture*, Vaughan Roberts uses these three key ideas—God’s people, God’s place, and God’s rule and blessing—and traces them through the course of the entire Bible. He breaks this down into eight stages of the unfolding Story of the Kingdom, each starting with the letter “P.” Let’s run through them together.

First, there is the **pattern** of the Kingdom described in the Genesis account (ch. 1-2). Beginnings are important, and God does not skimp on the details so we can get our bearings.

Here, right from the start, we are introduced to our protagonist, or main character in this Story—the Trinitarian God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Together, they work to create all that we see around us, with humanity being the pinnacle of that creation. He begins with the first son of God, Adam, and his wife, Eve (Luke 3:38).

After creating the first man and woman, He charges them as stewards and representatives to continue the work He began at creation: being fruitful and multiplying more image bearers to carry on the work of subduing, ruling, and exercising dominion on His behalf. They were to do as He has done—turning chaos, darkness, and emptiness into order, light, and life. In addition, Adam was charged to protect and keep the new world safe from intruders.

On the seventh day, God rested, not because He was tired, but because His work was finished. Now, our work has begun, and we are to do so until the work of filling the earth with His glory is completed.

This is the pattern: Each of us will take our place in this Story, generation after generation passing on the assignment, until our time on earth ends or when He returns. Our goal is to finish the assignment He has given us.

In this beautiful land, God had only one prohibition for the first humans—not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lest they die. But even that was for their good. (Gen 2:16, 17)

If only it would end there! But if we’re honest, all the good stories we know have some type of problem in it. What makes them inspiring and beautiful is not the absence of evil but seeing the hero wrestle and struggle to keep going in what is right.

As the creator of this world, God has created humans with will and choice. In not creating robots, God also created a situation where He sets Himself up to be rejected. And here also enters the antagonist: Satan manages to slither in and using the very prohibition God established, tempts and ensnares Adam and Eve with his lies. They believe him, with devastating results: a breach in their life-giving relationship with God. From that point on, instead of health and beauty, sin is wired into the very DNA and essence of who we are as humans.

Here, God's pattern is ruined, and we now enter the era of the **perished** kingdom. From here on out, sin rules and reigns over the world. We see its effects everywhere and we witness God's judgment on it through events like Noah and the tower of Babel.

But even immediately after the fall, God the hero, already had a plan to reverse this curse. In Genesis 3:15, God reveals the **promised** Kingdom, with hints at a plan to crush the enemy by sending a Savior. In His good time, He begins this long and slow journey towards our redemption by beginning with one man, Abraham.

To him, he makes tremendous covenantal promises, including all the Kingdom elements: a great **people**, living in a **place**—the land of Canaan or the Promised Land—and blessing to those who align themselves with **Him and His rule**. From Abraham is ultimately the seed of the nation of Israel from whom Christ will one day come. Little by little, generation by generation, God begins fleshing out these promises or prophecies in stages. And so begins the **partial** kingdom through this little nation.

This fledging nation, called “his firstborn son” (Ex. 4:22), finds refuge in Egypt during a famine with 70 people in Joseph's day and multiplies them to millions. From here, He raises up a leader for them who both knows the Egyptian ways yet is one of their own—Moses.

Through Moses's leadership, this ragtag and unlikely bunch is brought out of slavery into a land flowing with milk and honey. Like Adam and Eve, God led this people back to the Promised Land, placing them back into a “garden of Eden” for this beloved son.

God's intention was not to bless Israel alone, however. Rather, He intended that they would be a light to the other nations, pointing them back to God (Is. 49:6). Like Adam, they were to do this by guarding and keeping their garden from those that would lead them astray, but unfortunately, they did not. A few pagan nations are permitted to stay in the land instead of being removed, and they tempt and ensnare this “son” as well.

Like Adam and Eve, God must deal with the sin of this “firstborn son” as well. Ironically, He used the very nations around them to do so. The people would cry out for help. In response, He sent judges and finally establishes a king—incidentally, also referred to as God's sons. One of these kings—a man after God's own heart, King David, is promised a future King from his line to sit on the throne forever in 2 Sam. 7. This future descendant from his line will be the one to crush the head of the serpent as promised in Gen. 3:15.

Though promising, yet not surprisingly, it doesn't take long for things to unravel once again. King David's successor, his son Solomon, started out promising, but these kingly sons too succumb to the temptations of the evil one. This corrupted leadership did nothing to help the people to stay faithful to the Lord. Kings, priests, and people—they all play the adulteress.

And so begins the next segment of history—from **partial** kingdom to the **prophesied** Kingdom. But in another act of grace, instead of immediately judging them for their sin, God sends prophets—first Elijah and Elisha (1 and 2 Kings), and then many other men to call the nation back to wholehearted service of the Lord, warning them of the consequences if they do not.

While their messages were often dire and negative, we will also find hints of grace: the regathering of a scattered people, glimpses of a promised land, all under a king who serves His people and rule on the throne forever.

Unfortunately, the power of sin is strong, and the people do not heed the words of warning nor take hope in the promises of God. Therefore, God, as promised, must judge—this time not through flood or dispersion or enemy attack, but through exile.

Yet even here, God still shows grace. After they fulfilled the years decreed by God for their exile, their captivity ends, and though they are few, a remnant of God's people returned to the devastated land as promised (Is. 10:20-21). They rebuild the temple and life starts again.

However, though it appeared normal, things weren't quite right. Namely, there was no longer a king on the throne. It seems like the promise of 2 Sam. 7 was forgotten. Four hundred years pass. All is quiet. And so they wait, wondering if God will remember and restore that king once again.

Finally, one day, the promised messenger in Malachi 3:1 shows up, proclaiming repentance, for the kingdom of God is at hand: John the Baptist has come to herald the coming of Jesus, the perfect Son of God—Adam as he was meant to be.

But this deliverer rides in on a donkey, not a charger. This is not the one they wanted! Instead of heralding Him as king, they reject and crucify Him. Yet ironically, this is the way God ushers in the sixth "P"—the **present** Kingdom. This is the kingdom we are living in right now—today!

Through faith, Jesus is calling out not just physical descendants of Israel, but a new spiritual "Israel." God promised that many nations will be blessed through Abraham, and Jesus makes that possible. You and I are now part of this new Kingdom by faith.

As believers and citizens, we are now called to be ambassadors of our King. He sends us out to be fruitful and multiply more disciples to follow Him, to establish His kingdom throughout all the nations, what we often call the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). This is our job in the **proclaimed** Kingdom. This is our assignment today.

The window of opportunity is open now. If we recognize that we are now part of this Story, we will also realize we have work to do now! Though the Kingdom has begun, it is not here yet. With this task before us, we seek to gather as many people as possible to follow Him, before we lose our chance.

That means one day, this window of opportunity will close. Jesus will come again to reign forever in a new creation, the new Jerusalem, His **perfected** Kingdom. In this world, there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain (Rev. 21:4). Harmony will be restored at all levels—with God, with one another and with creation. Here, we will enjoy unbroken fellowship, with Him and one another. Here is God's Kingdom as He intended—God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing.

A beautiful life originates in God's Story. This story can bring so much hope to us. And it is vital that we know it. It must be the soundtrack of our lives. With this Story in our minds, we are oriented in the midst of a world that contradicts His Story. Unless we are making time to soak ourselves in this Story, the world's narrative will creep into the vacuum and lead us astray.

My friend, this is our time to step onto the stage of His Story. Let us not be Christians who merely know this Story propositionally but actually. As Kevin Vanhoozer writes, "It is not enough to parrot our lines; we have to live our parts."

That is the choice we have before us today. The Story continues. You and I live in these days of the proclaimed Kingdom. God has called us children of God (1 John 3:1) and given us a part in this Story, a role to play. Knowing this Story gives us the backdrop to understand our lives and our contribution. May this Story be the foundation of your perspective and the motivation to live fully in it.