



SIEBENQUELL

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## Take the Stories Seriously III

# One Episode does not a Story make

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Shortly after Christmas in 2016 I was on a train when I noticed that the man sitting across from me kept looking over at the book I was reading. Eventually he struck up a conversation and told me that his wife had given him the same book as a Christmas gift, and that he had started reading it, but had not gotten very far. Shortly before my arrival, I finished the book and closed it. He looked up and asked me, »Can you simply tell me how the book ends?« Spontaneously I responded, »If you only want to know how the book ends, you are not worthy of the story.«

I gave the man my answer with a smile on my face, but I was dead serious. Taking stories seriously, our own as well as the stories of God, requires us to learn that every incident, every phase and step, every event and movement is significant. We do not get to skip any of them in the stories of our lives for the same reason we do not get to skip any of them in the stories of God: the minute we do so, we can no longer deeply and accurately interpret the tale we are reading or the one we are living.

I learned this from a lesson by my beloved teacher. When a person would become fixated with one particular incident in their lives to the detriment of everything else happening in their lives, he would say, »One episode does not a story make«. If the

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person continued to fixate on this one incident, he would take an old paperback and ask them to summarise the book for him the next time they had a session. Then he would tear out one chapter and hand it to them, keeping the rest of the book for himself. That person would inevitably say, »You cannot expect me to summarise the book if you only give me one chapter from it!« To which he would reply, »I am surprised to hear that, because all during our conversation you have been claiming to be able to do precisely that. You have torn out one episode of your life and insist it is the whole story of your life. Harping and fixating on one part of your life, does not a story make, nor does it a story tell.«

One episode does not a story make. A story is a long haul experience. A story is a long journey, and, as in all long journeys, it entails many episodes, many experiences, many events and many trials. No one episode summarise a story. That is true of our personal stories with God as well. We can become so fixated with one particular experience, that we ignore all the other parts of the tale woven by God through our life. We become obsessed with a failure, a sin, a moment of brokenness, a time of sadness, and then speak of it as if there were no of success, no grace, no moments of healing and no times of joy. In doing so, we tell a story that does not actually exist, because our lives are richer and more complex than one episode, no matter how painful or important it might have been.

During the Second World War, the American radio broadcaster Paul Harvey began a series entitled »The Rest of the Story«. He would recount a story in which the listener was given little-known or forgotten facts. At the very end of the story, he would reveal a surprising fact or element, usually the name of some famous person. The broadcast always ended with the well-known line »And now you know the rest of the story«. Paul Harvey was a beloved storyteller, and when people were asked what they loved most about his stories, they unflinching spoke of the surprise twist at the end. Until the end of the story, you could never know where the story was going or whom it was about. He kept them in suspense until the very end. He enchanted two generations of radio listeners by teaching us, one episode does not a story make. You were always on the wrong path until you knew the rest of the story.

God is the architect of this style of storytelling. What makes us think that our own stories can be properly and accurately understood and interpreted without the rest of the story? Our own stories, told by God and woven by the Spirit, are full of surprising twists and turns, and it does us and others an injustice to reduce our lives to one episode or one event. Let us recapture the grace and style of telling the whole tale, and not breaking it off until we can say before God and our beloved brothers and sisters, »And now you know the rest of the story.«

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