

What's your favourite story?

What makes a story good? Characters we care about, exciting plotlines, surprising occurrences, great drama and romance, so much contributes to making a good story. One of my favourite movies is called Shaolin Soccer, it's about a group of kung-fu monks who use their martial arts skills to play football. It's funny, surprising and unique - it even includes a musical number! Now some of you here will be intrigued by that story, others think it sounds like the weirdest thing and you would never want to watch it. Some stories simply hold no interest for us – so for me, I find it I do not understand why people commit to watching a soap opera for year, I can barely stomach a single episode. But we are all different, and different stories appeal to us.

And the stories that we're interested in are not limited to books or films. "The philosopher James Bryan Smith writes 'Narrative is the central function... of the human mind. We turn everything into a story in order to make sense of life. We dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In fact, we cannot avoid it. We are storied creatures.'"

Everything tells a story – Story is everywhere; everything has a story. Look at the X-factor – it's just as much about the person's life story as it is about their ability to sing. Look at shops like Hollister – they have a whole fictional story about a man in California building a surf shop in the 1920s – when actually it was created as a spinoff of Abercrombie & Fitch in 2000! Or Innocent smoothies who built a brand around telling kooky stories about their fruit. Or those emotional John Lewis Christmas adverts who use story to tap in to your emotions to build a connection between you, your family and John Lewis products. Everyone tells stories, watches stories, is sold stories everyday.

We choose a story to live - But not only does everyone love a good story – we all LIVE by a story – or what philosophers would call a 'worldview. 'This is literally our view of the world. And it is something we often not even aware of!

Mark Roque says that "Worldviews are best understood as the dreams, longings and ambitions that get people out of bed in the morning. For some people it is profit. For others it's Islamic revolution. Still others crave status and celebrity. Some Buddhists are desperate to avoid reincarnation. Worldviews are the 'spectacles behind our eyes' – we look at the world through them, not at them.

Consider the ten million pound challenge. How would you live your life if you suddenly got a massive wad? Would you spend the rest of your life buying mansions, helicopters and sports cars? Or would you dedicate your considerable resources to ending the slave trade? Your answer to this question tells us what you really believe. Could you even imagine William Wilberforce dedicating his life to luxury cruises and endless games of golf? Every worldview tells a story. These stories function as maps that guide the way we live."

Our worldview comes from many different sources; the way our parents raised us, the opinions of our peers, the way things are portrayed in the media, our faith or religion, our moral code. It's about the way we answer key questions about ourselves and the world we inhabit. For example: what does successful like look like? Is about wealth? Is about happiness? Is it about overcoming challenges? Is it about following the law? Is about freedom? Your answer to that question will vary depending on your worldview.

Living Jesus' Story - As Christians, the core of our worldview is built around our faith in Jesus. Our aspirations, expectations and behaviour should be coming from our faith. However our faith will never be the only thing that forms our worldview; the place we live, the people we

interact with, the denomination of church we are part of – all of our existence will impact on the way we view the world.

Now their views are not the same as the previous generation (or the next one!) Which is why churches being intergenerational, including a mixture of different age groups and backgrounds is important. And the work we do with children and young people is especially important? Because, as German Sociologist Karl Mannheim's stated, "each generation derives its 'worldview' from the distinct events, experiences and attitudes absorbed in its youth" This is why the majority of people come to faith in their teenage years – it's very hard for an adult to let go of their worldview and embrace another.

So how should we respond to the cultural worldview that we have to live with; there are basically three different ways:

Reject culture: We can look at our society as a consumerist, materialistic nightmare and take no part in it. (or as little as possible.) We would follow the example of the monks and withdraw from the world into safe areas where everyone's worldview is more Christ-centred. We don't listen to worldly music or watch films that might be slightly dodgy. We avoid anything that might pull us away from Christ. The story we tell is that we don't want to keep up with the Joneses, we want to keep up with the Jesuses! We want to stand apart for Jesus, as an example for the rest of the world to aspire to.

The negative side is that by pulling away from the world, we are much less able to impact on it and much less able to understand it (except as a terrible thing to be avoided wherever possible). It's very hard to actually live this way, through work or school Christians will have to live as part of society, and if we reject almost everything that 'normal' people enjoy - how can we show that Jesus is for them too? Not just for 'weird' Christians?

Accept culture: So the other path is to accept the culture we live. To say that God created all things for us to enjoy - so let's enjoy them! We become like the people of the world in order to reach the people of the world. Our lives look very similar to that of non-Christian people but we infuse our lives with Jesus. The story we are telling is that Jesus is for everyone, and that Christians are just normal people living normal lives, but who also get the blessings of following Jesus!

The problems here is that if we just live the same as everyone else, how will people see the awesome difference that following Jesus makes?

Transform Culture: The third option falls between these two extremes but will also have a greater impact. In Romans 12: 1-2 Paul writes this "I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." Paul urges us to treat our lives as living sacrifices – giving up what we have for God. Giving our lives into his hands. And he says we should not conform to the predominant worldview of our culture but be transformed by following Jesus.

Christians are called to transform culture into something that brings glory to God. We're not to abandon the world for a Christian bubble, we're not to embrace everything either, we're to live in the world in order that we can be agents of transformation in the world.

Jesus message 2000 years ago – and still today – is and was 'REPENT'. Which means to change your mind! Change your thinking. It's what Paul talks about in Romans 12:1-2. We

need to think differently and help others do the same. Help them to see what's wrong with the story they've embraced and see why God's story makes sense

Mark Yaconelli writes that "...the sacred stories found in the Bible are part of the great story of God, through Jesus, reconciling the world. But we do more than just tell these stories; we believe and live into these stories. We allow these stories to penetrate our understanding of life, to form and shape us, to guide and articulate our own experience. The stories of Scripture are windows into the nature of God and humanity and our relationship to one another. They are stories that help us repent, heal, learn, grow and stretch toward God's love and wholeness." Mark Yaconelli We need to use the bible, our experience of God and our knowledge of the world to transform our culture and o is to enable other people to do the same.

How does this tell the story of Jesus? – They key to living a better story is to ask this By enabling them to do Theological Reflection – By which I means we ask this question - How does this tell the story of Jesus? – all the time, about everything we read, see or do. How does the way I use social media tell the story of Jesus?? How does the music of Taylor Swift tell the story of Jesus? How do the novels of JK Rowling tell the story of Jesus? Where can I see the story of Jesus in the life of Kim Kardashian? Where can I see the story of Jesus in the newspaper today? Or in my online zoom meeting? Or in my maths class? Or my sports team? Everything communicates a story, every product you buy, everything show you watch, every decision you make. So felect on everything you watch or listen to or read or talk about with this question: how does this tell the story of Jesus? And consider too, how does your life tell the story of Jesus of for others to read? What can you do in your everyday life to better tell His story?