

# When God Writes Your Story

by Stewart Ruch

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*God is the ultimate storyteller, and we have a choice to accept Him as the author of our lives, submitting to His story and living in the tension of staying in our own story with God while serving and being served by other stories.*

**Duration:** 27:34

**Scripture:** Ruth 1:16, Ruth 2:12, Ruth 4:13, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 16:24, Matthew 23:37, John 21:22

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the power of small and how every person's life is small until it becomes significant through Jesus. He uses the story of Ruth as an example of how submitting our lives to God's story can give us a meaningful and profound significance. The preacher also shares a real-life story of a pilot who had a miraculous experience when his parachute got tangled in a tree, saving him from certain death. Through this experience, the pilot witnesses the power of God and becomes a follower of Jesus, eventually becoming a missionary pilot in Colombia.

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## Transcript

A dear friend told me a story about his dad that if I didn't know this friend well and truly trust him, I would have thought that at the very least the story was exaggerated and at the worst, it was just utterly fabricated. His father was a young pilot learning different aspects of flight. A good pilot, somewhat cocky in his abilities, and the day came as part of his flight training where they wanted to simulate emergency and engine trouble and have to eject from the plane and make their way to Earth by parachute.

So this young pilot was actually excited for the day, he was looking forward to kind of show off his stuff and the time comes for the engine to malfunction and to eject out of the plane and he jumps from the plane, he's got his parachute, he pulls his parachute cord and to a kind of terror that perhaps none of us can begin to relate to, the parachute utterly malfunctions. It goes out but it's not able to catch the full wind, there are issues within the parachute itself and in milliseconds he realizes that like a missile, I am screaming towards Earth. He has a moment to realize that he's going to die and as he's moving at an untold speed towards a farm in Arkansas, his parachute finds its way to a backyard of a farm where two trees had been grown right next to each other and the parachute literally grabs two of the massive oak tree branches and he is left dangling a few inches above the very Earth that was going to pummel him.

Rose, the farmer's wife who lived in that farmhouse, heard something going on in the backyard, walks out to see this young pilot swinging from the branches of their oak trees, realizes immediately the absolute miracle that has just occurred and cries out with just a kind of full hearted, the Lord just saved your life! This pilot who was not a Jesus follower prior to the jump and was certainly reconsidering things at this point, didn't even know what to say. She calls her husband, he gets the garden shears, climbs up in the oak tree and cuts him down. They bring him down, a few bones are broken, but his back is intact.

He has literally had an absolute supernatural miracle saving experience. They bring him into the home and for the next couple of weeks, they literally nurse him back to health with the help of community doctors there and he watches Rose, he watches Rose's husband's life together and he realizes that there was something much greater than his pilot abilities going on with his life. He realizes that there is something overarching and someone who literally saved him from certain death and he gives his life, becomes a follower of Jesus, still goes forward with his pilot work but now becomes a missionary pilot in the jungles of Columbia, raises several children including my dear friend who told me that story.

Now hold there. There's no way that the thousands of street children in Sao Paulo, Brazil who spend their lives sniffing glue, being sexually exploited and basically living a life of hellish misery that most of us couldn't even begin to imagine, there's no way those thousands of street children would understand that Rose in Arkansas, USA who was used by God to bring my friend's father to the Lord, who then raised his son in the Lord, who then got a calling to go to Brazil and care for the very least of these in Sao Paulo have any connection with Rose. But their lives are actually profoundly contingent upon Rose who gave her life to Jesus at some point, who led Thomas' father to Jesus, who then raised Thomas to be a missionary in Brazil.

Whoa! Okay, if you hang around with Jesus followers, you're going to hear stories like this all the time. Almost every Jesus follower, maybe not quite that dramatic, but stories where things interlock and God is doing something and people, pieces of their lives have been moved around and then I happened to meet this person and then I saw them walking by me but they were from a different state or whatever it might be. Because the teaching of the Bible is that God is the great storyteller.

That God is writing the stories of millions of millions and millions of lives right now in every ethnic group, in every life that will give themselves to him and he's been doing it not just now but throughout the centuries. Now it's possible that if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus at this point and you're here and you're a committed follower of Jesus, you have something in common right now. Possibly both of you are going, wait a second, God as storyteller.

I've never heard that before. But the Bible actually teaches that Jesus is an author. It says that he's the author.

It's in a book called Hebrews. The chapter of that book is chapter 12. That Jesus is the author, that Jesus is writing the story of every human life.

But what the Bible also teaches and what I want to put in front of you today is A, you have to decide if you can accept the premise that God is the ultimate storyteller and that he actually is writing the story of everyone's lives. You have to accept that. But B, what I put in front of you, is will you choose personally to come underneath his pen? Will you choose personally to submit your life to his story because he actually gives you a choice.

For some of you today, that choice could mean conversion. You're not a Jesus follower. There's several of you who are not Jesus followers that are part of our Sunday community and beyond.

So for you, that would mean converting. It would mean actually realizing God is in control of all of this. I can live my life in God and taking steps toward that.

Anybody along the sides of the wall and about half of you people standing over there that are praying for people, they'd love to tell you more about that. For others, it may not be conversion. It may be a new commitment.

You've converted to Jesus. It's a new commitment. You need to have spelled out a little more clearly through the book of Ruth that we've been studying what it means to submit your story to the great storyteller.

What it means to risk your life for the great storyteller's story. And that may lead to a new commitment. I hope whatever group you're in, that any of you who seriously consider this, conversion, commitment, would also just be in absolute awe of just the sheer power of God to put in the weave and to interlock all these stories, moving toward one great story.

The story of Jesus. The story of His death. The story of His resurrection.

The story of His personal redeeming power in every person's life. He's taking all these millions and billions of stories and He's moving them all in one direction. One great story.

A story, Jesus' story, which is given to you to serve your story. He died for you to serve your story, to strengthen your story. He died for you to give you a meaningful story.

Now look, we talked about this last week. Everyone's life is small. We talked about when small is great.

And the name of this series is The Power of Small. Everybody's life is small. It only becomes significant.

And it becomes profoundly significant, like Rose, the farmer's wife, when we'll submit our lives to His story. You didn't have to hear last week's sermon to check with this week. I encourage you to listen to it.

It'll connect with this one. When we let God be the author of our story. Let's look at Ruth.

Ruth is a phenomenal short story. It's probably about 3,000 years old. And yet it is profoundly able to connect and to teach us about what it means to live our lives in God today.

We're in the second chapter of this great short story. Chapter 2. And first of all, we see that Ruth is someone who has learned to submit her story. And she starts by selecting her storyteller.

You basically get one of two choices. It's pretty simple. You can tell the story of your life, or God can write the story of your life.

It's one of two choices. Ruth made a decision for God, and she puts it this way to her really close friend and mother-in-law, Naomi. Your God will be my God.

As a matter of fact, she's interacting with Boaz. He was introduced in our story just this week. Boaz is a farmer.

He's from a small town in ancient Palestine called Bethlehem. That connects profoundly for those of us who have any background in the Bible, because we know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem a thousand years later. So we're seeing Boaz's story, which is the Bethlehem story.

And we're beginning to go, wait, wait, wait, wait. That connects with Jesus' story, which is the Bethlehem story. We'll watch this play out more.

Boaz is speaking to Ruth. She's come to glean common ancient Near Eastern practice whereby the poorest of the poor... In Ruth, we have the story of an immigrant, and the story of somebody who's come with nothing from very far away. She has nothing.

She's extremely poor. And Israelite culture said, for those who come with nothing we want to provide for them, they can go behind the harvesters, and whatever's left behind, and benevolent harvesters would throw stuff to provide for them. They can pick that up and they can eat that.

It's not stealing. It's provision. And Ruth is doing that.

She's practicing that provision. She's talking to Boaz about this. And Boaz reflects God's heart.

He's not God, but he reflects, he kind of speaks on behalf of God. She says in verse 10, and really the heart of this passage, by the way, are verses 11 and 12. That's what we're going to drill down into today.

She says in verse 10, how did I find such favor in your eyes? And Boaz says in verse 11, all that you've done for your mother-in-law, Ruth left where she lived, she lost her own husband, but she put Naomi's loss in front of her own loss. All you've done for your mother-in-law and Naomi since the death of your husband has been told to me. And how you left your father, your mother, your land, and came to what you did not know before.

The Lord repay you for what you've done. May full reward be given to you by the Lord, our God of Israel. And this is a critical phrase, probably the most important phrase in the whole book of Ruth.

Under whose wings you have come to find refuge. Under whose wings you have come to find refuge. Let me teach you an important Christian word.

The word is providence. And the word providence is best pictorially represented for you. If you want a picture of what providence means, providence means that God is like one who has wings, like a hen who would gather chicks close in.

The idea of providence is that we come underneath God. We come underneath God's life. We come underneath God's protection.

We come underneath God's beautiful, all-encompassing story, telling power and ability. He's saying to her, you have come underneath the wings of God. You have given your life to God.

You have selected God as your storyteller. It didn't have to go that way. As best as we can tell, Ruth had a sister named Orpah.

She did not make the same choice. As best as we can tell, at least in the story, she does not choose God as the storyteller of her life. Jesus picks up this image a thousand years later.

He's teaching. And he actually uses the image of wings. He knows this passage.

And he says to Jerusalem, he's a Jew, he's speaking to other Jews primarily, he says, how I wanted to gather you under my wings. It's the same thing with Ruth. How I wanted to be like a hen with chicks and gather you under my wing.

I wanted to bring you into my story. I wanted to tell your story, Jerusalem. I want to tell your story, Israel.

And then he says, and this is so important, but you were not willing. Matthew chapter 23. That's in the New Testament of the Bible.

But you were not willing. Take a breath here. It's an important moment.

There's no way I'm assuming with a group of this size that every one of us is willing to come under the wings of the Lord. I'm assuming some of you are in a decision context right now about that. I'm assuming some of you have made a strong decision for that first willingness.

You are under the wings of the Lord. You've converted. But I'm assuming that you, if you're at all like me, have parts of your life that have not come under the wings of the Lord.

Parts of your life where you've said, I'll take the pen, I'll write this part. You've negotiated with God. Hey, tell you what, let's do a co-authorship.

I'm not crazy. I can be the only author. How about I write the financial plan for my life and you write everything else? How about, because this is really personal, God, how about I write the sexual plan for my life and you write everything else? The stakes are too high in my career.

How about I write the career plan of my life and you write everything else? This is the heart of what it means to become a Jesus follower, is to say you are the author and finisher. The verse, the book of Hebrews chapter 12, you are the author and finisher of my life. It's your pen.

Okay, how? How do we actually do that? What does it look like to kind of enter into the movement of making God the storyteller of our life? We learn from Ruth. We see in Ruth. To do this and to really live in God being the storyteller of our life requires a willingness to grow in maturity.

And often growing in maturity in lots of areas of life means living in tension. And there is a God being the storyteller tension in life. Here's the tension.

On one hand, we are called to stay in God's story for our life. We're called to stay in the story He's writing. We're called to be responsible to God for the story He's writing in our lives.

Stay in our story. Stay in God's story. On the other hand, because it isn't all about our story, we're called to serve and be served by other stories.

We're staying in our story and yet we're syncing up with other stories in profound ways. That's a tension. It's really important to live in both.

Ruth lives in both. Let me explain that. First of all, Ruth stays in God's story for her life in this way.

In the first chapter of this short story, when Naomi, the mother-in-law who's lost both of her sons and her husband returns to Bethlehem, her hometown. Everyone's so happy. Welcome back, Naomi.

She says, don't call me Naomi. Immediately, what's happened to Naomi? She says, they call me bitter because of how God has dealt with me. The story doesn't judge Naomi.

She's suffered a profound crisis. It takes years, years to heal from that trauma. But Ruth doesn't call her life bitter.

Naomi's in her life with God. God's writing her story. But Ruth has the freedom to stay in her story with God.

She serves Naomi. She loves Naomi. She provides for Naomi.

She wants to be with Naomi. And yet at the same time, she doesn't say, and call me bitter too. Because my friend had this experience, so that experience is now going to color the rest of my life as well.

There's a way in which Ruth stays in her story with God. God's writing my story. God's writing Naomi's story.

And there is a mystery, brothers and sisters. There is a holy thing to God writing someone else's story. Now you get close to them.

You love them. You care for them. But you can't write their story.

And they can't write your story. And it's really important that your theology, how you think about God, so think about theology, your theology, your life practice is all determined by God's story and not someone else's story. And I can't tell you how often super smart people build their theology, what they know about God, what's true about God, how to live the Christian life out of someone else's story.

More often than not, when someone's talking about something difficult or controversial, they'll say to me, well, they won't even say what the Bible says. They'll just say, I know this person. They've lived with this.

Now, of course we're having, we're rightly impacted by other people's story. But the Bible teaches that we're to give an account for our own life. Book of Romans, New Testament, chapter 14.

Everyone will give an account for their own life. What that means is stay in God's story for you. This is really hard for many of us that are very relational.

Americans love talking about generations because we have the time and the luxury to write things about generations. Most countries don't do this. So, back in the early 90s, big Time magazine splash, Generation X. That's my generation.

They wrote about how we're super relational. We love experience. We're the warm, fuzzy version of our boomer older brothers and sisters.

Boomers are producing and getting things done. We're the relational folks. And many of us took that on.

We're very, very relational. We thought we were relational. We thought we were the relational king or queen of the hill until the millennials came along.

Whoa! Okay, I spend lots of my time with millennials and I'm so thankful because I'm always being taught by the millennial generation. Always. And I mean that.

I'm not just saying that to be a nice preacher. I mean it. But you guys are uber relational.

And I watch you get out of your story and get into somebody else's story a lot. And I watch you let your theology and your seeing of God be influenced not first and foremost by God's story sometimes but by your own story. Now, we do it too.

All people do it too. We all do it. But certain generations have certain gifts.

And with those gifts sometimes come certain challenges. It all gets constellated at this point when Peter and John, two key followers of Jesus, are walking with Jesus. And Peter says to Jesus about his buddy John, So what are you going to do in John's life? What's John's story, basically? And Jesus says, paraphrasing, I've got John's story in hand.

Back off, Peter. And then not paraphrasing, he says to Peter, What is core to this teaching? You follow me. Okay.

But, attention. Our story is not just our story. It's not just about me and my story.

Right? That would be giving in to the spirit of the age. That's not what we're about. Our story then serves other people's story.

If you can differentiate clearly who you are in Jesus, then you're actually equipped to serve other people's story. And to be served by the story. You're equipped to actually sync up with them.

You're equipped to work together with them and partner with them. That's actually the beauty of what happens in a marriage. Two people who are differentiated, they know who they are in Christ, they know who they are, and yet they come into profound sync up.

They come into profound synchronicity. They come into profound union. And that happens as well.

Look, Ruth would never have found Boaz in the field and provided for the family if Naomi hadn't had the relationship with Boaz. Naomi's story, her background serves Ruth's story. They serve one another's story.

And then Ruth and her willingness to take a huge risk and go glean, which is actually potentially very violent for a woman who can be exploited in those circumstances by the workers. Ruth lives her life and she serves Naomi's story. Our stories are not utterly independent of each other.

They're clearly before the Lord, but they're actually profoundly interlocked. What we need to stay in our story that God is writing, it's also likewise true that our story is not independent of other stories. Catherine and I in our 20s very much saw our story as independent.

We were zealous folks. We were passionate folks. We were ready to go out and do anything God wanted us to do.

We were here at Res in our 20s, but we were always thinking, at some point we're just going somewhere completely different. And by the way, people do that. That's God's sovereign call sometimes.

But we thought about it in a very isolated way. It was as if we thought, okay, our life story is like a Lego piece, and we're going to throw our Lego piece somewhere into the future and somewhere very obscure,

and just throw it there. And then we thought, somehow that Lego piece is going to land wherever it's going to be, Botswana, or somewhere in South America, or Asia.

We're going to land that piece somewhere, and then it's just going to magically multiply other Lego pieces and build something. Here's the deal. You can't build anything with one Lego piece.

You can't. It's just a Lego piece. Lego pieces are built to be built on top of each other.

That's why they have those little raised dots. Every human life has Providence dots on them. Every human life, in God's great story, is connected to other people's story.

It's like, actually what happened was not that we just flung ourselves out into somewhere utterly unknown and completely without any connection. Not even Ruth did that. She went with Naomi to Naomi's hometown.

It was a huge risk. But it was connected. It's actually what we would do if we connected with our life at Rez and our life in Wheaton.

Again, it doesn't mean people aren't sent out, but you're sent out in a connected way, so that actually our Lego piece is connected with somebody else's Lego piece, and this little tower got built, and then God built a bridge over here and another tower over here, and that all kind of happened, and now it's doing ministry in Wheaton and greater Chicago, but then there's something else going on with the larger Midwest area, and those Lego pieces are getting built, and this happens in everybody's life. Lego piece upon Lego piece upon Lego piece because of this massive Lego empire. Yes, I just described God's kingdom as a massive Lego empire because that's the best I can do to try to get clear with you.

You serve one another's stories in profound ways. Do you want direction? Do you want to know how God is leading you? Well, look at the stories around you. And to get clear about your story with God, your Bible time, your prayer time is essential, but then look at those stories around you and how He's connecting you.

It all works together. It interlocks. This is really important for me because not only do those street children in Sao Paulo, Brazil, benefit from Rose, who led Thomas' dad to conversion and raised Thomas in the faith, I benefited because Thomas was the one reason alone that I went to Wheaton College, which I did and met my wife and then began my work.

And now I work five minutes from Wheaton College, utterly influenced and Lego piecing with Wheaton. Because I didn't want to go to Wheaton. It was an evangelical college.

I wasn't raised evangelical. And by happenstance, Thomas is in Glee Club. They're going through my hometown of Indianapolis.

And by happenstance, he stays at our house. And by happenstance, we have this massive personal connection. No, it's not happenstance.

It's God's story interlocking with my story to interlock with other stories. So we submit our story by staying in God's story for us and yet serving and being in other people's story. But we also not just submit.

We risk. And I don't mean risk like extreme sport risk. I don't mean risk like thrill-seeking type of risk.

Those are junior varsity risks. Those are like shadows. I mean, it's fine if you do extreme sports.

But it's a shadow of the real risk. The real risk, the super exciting risk, is the life of giving yourself completely to Jesus Christ. Oh, the lie that the Christian life is cramped and small and narrow.

The Christian life is expansive and creative and full of so much risk. You've got to be brave of heart to be a Christian. Because you live your life when only God can finish the story.

Great stories don't tell you how they're going to finish them. To live in the story that God is writing means there's going to be all kinds of unpredictability, all kinds of questions, all kinds of how's this going to work out. If your life has too much predictability, it's very possible your life is not submitted to God's story.

Now, planning is good and biblical, but plan not for that which is only possible, but for that which is only possible with God. Make a financial plan. Absolutely.

But in that financial plan, there better be a massive God-shaped gap where you go, this is only going to work with God. Make a plan for your career. But have a massive God-shaped gap in your career.

This is only going to happen if God intervenes. The only way Ruth fed the family was because God intervened through Boaz. That's how it happened.

She didn't know how that was going to happen. Look at Ruth. What a risker.

She reminds us of Abraham a thousand years before who was the man that left everything and went. And she's like Abraham a thousand years later. Risk your life for God's story.

He's writing the story. G.K. Chesterton, early 20th century Christian thinker said, For life to be a story, it is necessary that a great part of it should be settled without our permission. For life to be a story, it is necessary that a great part of our story should be settled without our permission.

i.e. God is the author of our story. And it requires risk. Let me close with this picture.

It's a tree picture. We started with a tree. We'll end with a tree.

My wife grew up in Brazil and I was once there with her and we were watching these monkeys in the trees. They were really fun to watch. And what they would do is they would actually, you know, swing out and have this moment in midair where their hand had left one vine and they didn't exactly seem to know where they were going but they always found another branch or vine that they grabbed onto.

And then they'd swing out again, vine, swing out again, branch, swing out again, trunk. Living life submitted to God's story. Living a life of risk that requires for God to intervene is a life with a lot of midair moments as a monkey where you're going, I just left one and I don't know where I'm going to the next.

But I believe God's telling this story and writing it and there's something to grab onto right there. It's a decision that we are given to make. Will we come under the wing of the Lord's story or will we not be willing? In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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