

My Story is Personal

Dak Prescott – Finish the Fight Video

Hook-

Pretty cool huh? How'd that make you feel? I remember last winter when they began releasing this series of videos about different players from the Dallas Cowboys and I remember the feeling that as I was watching these videos, that I was connecting with the players on a deeper level. I've never met any of those guys, yet that video, Dak's story, leads me to believe that I have a little better insight into the man that is Dak Prescott, Quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys. You see, that is the power of a well told story, the power of a story embraced, it creates connection.

In almost any meaningful relationship we have, there was a conversation where personal stories were shared, where trust was established, and connections were made. Stories have always been a powerful tool for communication; before culture could write books, history was recorded orally through stories so that it could be passed from one generation to the next. Stories preserve ideals, communicate purpose, and develop connection in relationships. The other thing that's great about them is that everybody has one. Everyone has a personal experience of joy, sadness, success, and failure; everyone has a personal story. Now, everyone also has to recognize something, we have to choose to embrace our story or to ignore it and for Christians this is less of a choice and more of a command. We can choose our own path but, we have to embrace the reality that **Everyone has a personal story that can be used to glorify God and empower others.** God has created a personal story through you, that can impact others and lead them into a better understanding of his love. The question you have to answer is, "what are you going to do with it?"

Book - 1 Timothy 1: 12-17

God has given you a personal story that can be used to glorify him and empower others. As we can see from our passage today, nowhere is this fact more visible than scripture itself. We can go off and list many names and stories in these pages that have impacted our lives. I find the story of King David especially attractive: Weapons, hunting, heroic battle scenes, and pretty girls - Essentially everything a guy could want in a story. While there are probably many favorite stories in this room, one could argue that no story speaks to this truth more than the story of the Apostle Paul.

In today's passage we have Paul sharing his story with a young pastor named Timothy. Timothy was pastoring the church in Ephesus while Paul was on a missionary journey in Macedonia. Timothy was converted by Paul when he was a child, and they had such a close relationship that Paul referred to him as a "son in the faith." Paul knew Timothy would encounter challenges so he sent him this letter to encourage him as he sought to lead the church. In this letter Paul used his personal testimony to combat false teaching in the church. He's using his life to prove the truth of his theology and the power of Christ. **Paul is using his story to influence others in the name of Christ and to bring glory to the work of God in his life.**

Look –

Now in this section of the letter, I see three things that are going to impact how we talk about this passage today.

1. This a personal story of sin, darkness, and evil

As we see from this retelling, Paul was not always the great apostle. Make no mistake about it, before his conversion Paul was an evil, merciless, murderer. In Acts chapters 7-8 we can see stories of Paul chasing, torturing, and murdering Christians. All of his work in this area culminated in the murder of the martyr of Stephen, one of the churches earliest leaders. Before Paul's conversion his life was riddled with events and stories similar to what we see in the world around us today. He wasn't just a Jew, he was a legalistic student of Jewish law, who sought out opportunities to persecute and rid the world of Christians. Paul did many evil things and committed many sins in his life before he was changed. Before his conversion, many Christians saw him as a living example of evil.

2. This is a personal story of forgiveness, hope, and life

Forgiveness, hope, and life are never out of reach. Paul was an awful man. A man who violated every rule in the book for a religion that was all about rules. In fact, he was on his way to hurt even more people when he was confronted by Christ on the road to Damascus in Acts Ch. 9. However after this confrontation we see God say to his messenger Ananias that Paul is his chosen messenger to carry his word to the gentiles, to kings, and to the children of Israel. Paul takes this a step farther and communicates that God is using him as an example that hope is never lost and that anyone can find life in Christ. Paul is thankful for the change he has experienced because of God's forgiveness. He gives God credit for his transformative work in the world; work that started with Paul's own redemption story and personal experience of with forgiveness, hope, and new life.

3. This personal story impacts a relationship

Finally, we see that Paul uses his story to impact a personal relationship in his life. Paul's relationship with Timothy motivated him to share his story. It's never fun to relive things we are not fond of, but the reality is personal stories of failure often inspire personal stories of success. Paul needed a tangible illustration for the powerful message he was communicating to Timothy and he used his own story to be just that. Paul didn't shy away from his story, he used it to encourage and empower Timothy. In short, this is what all stories do when shared in the proper context: They develop connection between people and they empower people to act. Paul's relationship with Timothy motivated him to share his personal story.

Took –

Story about Class with Tony Wheeler at F2F

Now, from all of this information I see three things that we can use in our own lives to help us as we seek to share our personal story to glorify God and empower others.

1. Resist Shame

For all of us, this is probably the hardest aspect of sharing our personal story. We are confronted with the shame we feel from our personal failures as Christians, parents, children, students, citizens and people. Well, let me share something with you, nothing about the shame you feel comes from God. God goes as far as he can to reject that idea. The bible says that God separates us from our sin as far as the east is from the west, once we accept Christ we are welcomed into the family of God and we become children of God. Like Jesus when God looks at us he sees someone who he loves and in whom he is well pleased. When we feel shame, shame is not God convicting us for the past, it's actually the devil trying to keep us from relinquishing the control sin has on our life. Shame keeps you from being an effective story teller and it keeps us from experiencing God's power at work in our life. Friends I can't express enough how crucial this step is, if you are carrying burdens and shame from things in your life, you need to get with someone and share. Get with a pastor, a small group leader, another trusted believer and talk with them. Let them remind you of the truth, the truth that God loves you and that he wants you to walk in that love, not shame for your past. **He wants to give you the freedom to be personal because he is personal.**

2. Look for Opportunities

As I said before, making an effort to create disciples is not just a request, it's actually a command of Christ himself. Look at the end of Matthew 28, before Jesus leaves earth for good, he commissions his disciples to go in authority and make disciples. Your story is probably one of the most crucial tools you have to carry out this command. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not telling you to go out and air your dirty laundry with reckless abandon. I'm not telling you to go out and attempt to become a great evangelist like Billy Graham. What I am encouraging you to do is actively look for opportunities you have in your everyday, natural, life. Everyday many of us interact with the same people at work, at school, at sports practice, people who live next door, people who fall into the natural flow of our lives. Stop for a second, close your eyes, think of someone you know who needs some encouragement in their life, maybe it's someone who doesn't have a relationship with God, maybe it's someone who has walked away from God. Whatever the case, we all know someone; we all probably have a relationship with someone who would willingly listen to us share our story with them. We just have to be on the lookout actively seeking and praying for opportunities to share. **We have to be personal with others because God is personal with us.**

3. Share Hope

All too often we get caught up in sharing our story with a heaven vs. hell mentality. We get so overwhelmed sharing about life, death, and eternity that we often forget to share the most important aspect of our faith. Love. Whenever we share our story with someone, it should be an encouraging

uplifting experience; it should be out of love for God and love for that person, not just a desire to win souls. It's really hard to come off as a loving person when we automatically confront sin and accuse people of living the wrong way. Jesus would always confront people on sin, but he also always did it with compassion and in some form of relationship. He was either already engaged with them in everyday life or he offered to engage with them in everyday life afterwards. When you share your story with someone, do it in your everyday life in an everyday setting. Personally, I prefer conversations in a quiet place with coffee, but that may not be the case for you. Keep it casual and share in a way that communicates the hope you have found in your personal relationship with Jesus. You should leave the person wanting to know more from positive perspective, not running away in fear of their eternal destination. Tell them how your life was, why you decided to make a change, and how it is now. Let them ask questions, really listen them, and keep your answers simple. Paul used one paragraph to provide irrefutable proof of God's work in his story. We should strive to do the same. **God wants you to personally offer hope to others because he personally offers hope to you.**

Conclusion

Confronting the reality of your life is scary, it is vulnerable, it takes a little bit of humility, and quite a bit of self-confidence. As I reflect on this I am reminded of the story of a young man from England. George was a successful business man with strong family connections and deep desire to learn about God. Yet he found the church of his time, The Church of England, to be mostly spiritually empty. No priest or religious leader could speak to him. He was told things like, "smoke tobacco and read the psalms" or "get married and settle down." Some even told him to join the army and that would take care of the longing he felt in his heart. George found no respite from his worry in these comments and eventually he just stopped sharing with others. It wasn't until he had a profound experience with God, where the Holy Spirit spoke to him and said **"There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,"**. The story goes on to say that this deeply personal experience rejuvenated George and eventually launched a revival of sorts in England. What started as a personal faith experience became the launching pad for an entire religious movement called the Society of Friends. However, none of this would've been possible without two things: 1. George's willingness to pursue God and 2. his willingness to share that experience with others. **You see through sharing his experience George was able to illustrate something to people: Everyone has a personal story that can be used to glorify God and empower others.**

So again I ask you, "what are you doing with yours?" Church, our world is full people in need of hope, people with a desperate need to know that Jesus cares about them. There are people up and down our streets in America who have never heard the story of someone who authentically believes in God and has given their life to his service. God used all sorts of rabble and rebellious people to accomplish his purposes in the bible and he wants to do the same for you. He wants to empower you to be a true, authentic, and personal representation of his love. You just have to decide if you are going to let him. This week you have two choices you can leave here feeling empowered to go and make an impact in someone's life in the name of Jesus or you can leave here and pretend nothing has changed. My hope is that you will seek to change the life of someone you know this week. God has given you a personal story and he wants you to use it. Before you leave, consider getting personal with God. if you

need to talk, find someone our staff we'd be glad to talk with you. if you need to pray, be sure and take time pray. If you need to confess something, confess before God. Prepare to be personal with others by being personal with God. God wants you to be personal with him so that through you, others can come to know how personal he is.

Let's Pray