

# Application of the Story to Our Story

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In story analysis, the final step is "application." During the analysis process the reader will have found himself entering deeper and deeper into the story with which he is working. At some point he will find that he has become a part of the story. The story has, in fact, pulled him into it. This usually happens when one hears or reads a story or attends a stage play, film, or theatrical production. We walk from the theater thinking about what this story says to us and how it affects us, or we lay down the book we are reading and begin to think about what it has to say to us and, especially, how this story applies to our own story.

Story analysis and dramatic analysis are very similar at this point. As well as being a literary composition, drama is a performing art, something that is played out by actors upon a stage, whether a theatrical stage or the stage of daily life. Essentially, drama is something that is experienced, not only by the actors, but also by all who are drawn into the drama, whether upon the stage or by being drawn into what is happening on the stage. We've all experienced this. We identify with the characters and become absorbed into the action (i.e., become part of the story). What we do not realize is that we do this in all aspects of life. We identify with the players with whom we are associated and are absorbed into the action of their story.

## Writing Our Story

We are all players of a story that goes on every day. Drama is a reflection of life or the experiences of daily existence. The drama of human existence is "the story" we all live out every day. We all begin

our lives as a part of someone else's story. As we grow to maturity, we began to want the story we are in to become our own story, a story in which we become the main character. As is the case with all stories, our story will reflect the characteristics of other stories having made an impression on us. We tend to model ourselves after the main players of the stories we have heard. We want our stories to have similar story lines, involve similar supporting players, stage setting, action, dialogue, and themes as in the stories we admire.

Those who have been the storytellers of our lives are numerous. They begin with our primary care givers, such a parents, grandparents, or other caregivers. These change as our story develops. Our siblings, teachers, friends, community figures, and especially, the players of the stories by which we are daily entertained, become the sources of the stories we hear and experience. These sources play a major role in the writing of our own story. The heroes of our story will be drawn from the heroes we admire in the stories we have read. The supporting players who will be a part of our story will be drawn from these stories. The behaviors we wish to emulate will be drawn from the stories we are told. The events or action we wish to be a part of our story will the same as the events of the stories that have influenced us. Needless to say, stories are powerful forces in the lives of everyone and are, consequently, very powerful developmental forces of the culture in which our story takes place.

## The Storytelling Tradition

The role of stories in our own lives and in the culture of which we are a part is significant. This should help us to see why God has chosen stories as a medium of communication with man. As observed earlier, the storytelling tradition is one of the earliest and most effective ways of communicating the beliefs and values of a community from one generation to another. Why stories? The overwhelming value placed on stories within our culture tells us that there is something about stories that make them one of the most effective means of communicating ideas or concepts. Most of us can understand something when it is communicated to us in a story. In

addition, we can usually remember what we have learned by means of a story, and these qualities endear them to us. There is something about stories and storytelling that gives them an almost magical quality.

Cultural anthropologists call man "the storytelling animal." It is the case that the human race always has loved stories. Man is, without question, a being who loves stories and the storytelling craft. From the very beginning of man's existence, as reflected in the earliest books of Scripture, God has communicated with man by means of stories. With exception of the poetic books, all of God's revelation to man, found in the Hebrew Scriptures, was given in the form of stories. Jesus of Nazareth used stories to reveal the nature of God to the human race, as well as God's will for his creation. From Adam and Eve, through the history of the Patriarchs, the history of Israel, the message of the prophets, to the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, stories have been the means by which God's will has been revealed to man. All of the prophets and inspired messengers of God were storytellers. The Gospels tell us the story of Jesus and the book of Acts of Apostles tells us the story of those who heard and believed his story. These believers became storytellers, and the story they told the world was the story of Jesus. In fact, the religion of Christianity owes its very existence and its spread into the various cultures of the world, to storytellers and the story they told called, "the gospel."

### God's Story and Your Story

One of the major causes of the phenomenal spread of Christianity throughout the Western world was the power of the stories the Christians told and what these stories were able to do to those who believed them. This is due to the fact that those who first told these stories believed themselves to be a part of the stories they told. On the day of Pentecost (cf., Acts 2), the apostles of Christ set this whole movement in motion with a story, a story they knew well because they had been a part of it. They were there as this story happened. They were on the stage of human history with Jesus of Nazareth. They were there when and where these things happened, a part of the historical setting. They were supporting players, a part

of the action and the dialogue. They heard the teaching of Jesus directly from him and were able to question him concerning the meaning of the themes he used in his telling of the story of God. They saw the things he did and the fulfillment of the things he said he would do, especially his resurrection from death. The story they carried into the whole known world was a story of the presence of God within the life of this person, Jesus of Nazareth, and the lives of the men associated with him, and they were the men. They communicated to those to whom they told this story that they too could become a part of this story. Being a part of something of great significance is very appealing to most people, especially if it is a story of great significance.

Here is where "application" takes on its most important function. Application is a way of putting on the wardrobe of the players, of standing on the stage with them, of entering into the action of the scenes, engaging in the script with lines of your own, and taking on the themes of the story in a very real and personal way. The story is both an objective fact and a subjective experience for the reader. This is especially true of the themes developed out in the story. Rather than standing as words or phrases about things of interest to the mind they become the very themes of their own personal lives. So is it with the contemporary reader, who, through belief of the story, enters into the story and becomes a part of it. The theme of the visitation of God, which occurred in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, is not just an ancient moment in the history of man. What happened 2,000 years ago can cause God's presence to become a living and abiding reality in the life of everyone by means of belief in this story. The theme of the sin of man is not just a means of explaining why the world is in such darkness. Sin is the reason I am in this darkness. What happened in the resurrection of Jesus has caused me, as a player in the story of God, to be able to die to my existence in Adam and enter into a new existence in Christ.

### Application Is Identifying with the Story

Application is simply a matter of putting ourselves into the story, of getting on stage, or becoming one of the players within the

scenes or stories. Application is asking ourselves, with which of the players of this scene do we most closely identify. It is asking where on the stage would I be most comfortable, in the light or in the darkness. It is asking which lines of the script belong on my lips. When the stage director says "action," what action would be most appropriate for me? "*Where am I in this story?*" is the critical question in application.

Application, in the story analysis craft, requires becoming involved in communication with the text of the story. This involves going into the story with questions, asking these questions of all particulars of the story, then letting the story speak back to you in answer to your questions. Then comes listening! Listening as the story tells you about its players, their place on the stage in the Biblical text, their actions of rebellion against God or their actions of response to the love of God, the conversations of the players about the issues, the action, the themes of the story, and, then, listening with both the mind and the heart as the "application step" tells you where you are in this story and, more importantly, where you should be.

## Conclusion

Each of the New Testament Gospels is a composition made up of difference scenes of the divine drama, or "God story." This is the story of the visitation of God to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Each scene is presented in story format consisting of players, stage setting, dialogue, action and themes.

In this, one is simply looking at the composition before him as a drama or story. Each study should consist of an analysis of the scenes portrayed in each chapter, pulling out each part giving meaning and interpretation to the scene. From the interpretation of what is going on in the text, we must move to an application of what is going on in us. In order for us to be a part of this ancient story, we must enter into the scenes making up the story by means of a recreation of that which originally gave the story its life; i.e., the players, the stage setting, dialogue, action, and the themes. At this point, however, for application to become a reality, we must become players in the story.

We must enter onto the stage, engage in the action and dialogue, and live out the themes placed there by the one who created us in Adam and came here again to recreate us in Christ. This is where this story becomes a transforming force – the power of God unto salvation.

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