

Numbers 11 Part 1: Tending to Our Story

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“Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched. So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the LORD had burned among them.”

-Numbers 11:1-3

We are now in the narrative portion of this book. Unfortunately, many people who attempt to read through the book of Numbers, or as the Hebrews called it “In the Wilderness”, are defeated by the first ten and a half chapters of tedious preparation. As we spoke about last time, while these passages are indeed tedious, they nevertheless contain priceless universal lessons that use long repetition to nail down our attention and really impress on us the seriousness of these simple lessons of practical preparation before a time “in the wilderness”, which means a time of adversity, transition, or trial.

But in Chapter 11 we enter into a story that is neither tedious nor frivolous. This story is universally relevant and can help us understand the cause for Israel’s wilderness wandering. Symbolically this represents a time of failure in which someone fails to “return home” after a time of “initiation” or transition. While the final failure hasn’t happened yet that will actually bar this generation of Israelites from entering the Promised Land, the seeds of that failure are being sown in this account.

What is even more interesting, is that these first three verses give us a blueprint for every major failure that Israel will suffer in this book, and by doing this, it gives us a more general, and symbolic account, of how failure of this type repeats itself in our own lives. The initial cause of the failure is complaint, which causes divine wrath, which consumes the margins of the camp, but, by the grace of God, the judgement spares the majority of the people, and then God leaves a lesson for the Israelites to learn from the judgement as they march on.

This more simple and condensed pattern found in these first three verses plays itself out at length in the following chapters, notably for us, in the remaining verses of chapter 11. In order to save space, I will summarize the account given throughout the rest of the chapter, and we will take the next two weeks to explore this account. The people of Israel complain about the lack of particular foods in the wilderness and they long to return to Egypt. Moses loses heart and complains to God about the people, and God answers both complaints by giving a “gift” to the people that both answers their craving, but also judges their complaint.

Moses’ leadership is “dispersed” amongst various leaders of Israel who receive the prophetic gift that he held before God, (this sows the seed of destruction in future stories within this book) and the nation of Israel is given quail, but also a curse that strikes down the “greedy” among the nation.

Tending to our Story

Before we get into the lustful and bitter complaining of the people of Israel, I wanted to take this week to focus on an important point that God is trying to teach throughout this book, and it has something to do with the “story” that God has given to each of us. I think for the modern person, it is hard for us to think of our lives as a “story”. For our ancestors who lived their lives steeped in traditions, stories, and rituals, it was easy for them to think of their lives in narrative terms. But for the modern person who is disconnected from tradition, ritual, and is inundated by shallow stories, this type of understanding is hard for us to grasp.

As such, many of us don’t attach much meaning to our stories and tend to drift through life without any real grounding or intentionality. An extreme expression of this type of thinking is found in Shakespeare's tragedy, “Macbeth”. In this play, a man named Macbeth and his wife are inspired by three demonic witches to invert the moral order and gain power through murdering the rightful king of Scotland. But by doing so, both of them find that meaning is being stolen from their lives, they become nihilistic and eventually both come to tragic ends. After Macbeth’s wife dies, Macbeth gives one of the most famous speeches in all literature:

*“To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.”*

-William Shakespeare - “Macbeth”

Since Shakespeare is one of the most complex thinkers to ever exist, I won't claim that there is merely one way to interpret this play. But for the sake of our discussion today, one way to understand this play is that Macbeth is a man who didn't tend to his story. His life was one of loyalty to the king, and fidelity towards his wife. But in order to gain power he ignores the lessons of his past and forges a new path forward disconnected from the moral universe that he had participated in and destroying all loyalty and honor that had given him the life that he enjoyed.

But he could only really do this by pretending that his actions wouldn't have any real consequences, that he could bend the moral world for one brief act of murder, and then return to the universe as a just and wise king. This belief poisons his soul until he can no longer see that all the tragedy occurring to him was the fruit of his own treacherous actions. However, when we examine the narrative before us, the same basic lesson is contained in these verses.

The Israelites are not tending to their story. They have lost the connectivity to their past, they have lost the lessons that God had taught them in the previous months and because of this they can't understand the connection between the various punishments that they suffer and their own actions. This is a danger that all of us face. Though our lives are not as neat and organized as a written narrative or fictional story, they are "written" by our Father and thus they are filled with cosmic meaning and significance, which is exactly how King David saw his life in Psalm 139:

"Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them."

-Psalm 139:16

Today we read these accounts as stories from the long past, not really reckoning with the fact that for the Israelites living through these circumstances, this was not a mere story to instruct others, it was their life. By placing the real events of these people's lives within a coherent narrative, the Biblical authors are encouraging us to see our lives in this same context. Every day, more "pages" of our story are being filled in. Our growth and development, our loves and losses are all being laid out in accordance with God's divine plan for our lives. And each one of these "chapters" is filled with meaning and significance if only we are willing to "tend" to our stories and truly learn these lessons for ourselves. I really like how this one Christian story teller put this point:

"There's no one in this whole wide world that isn't carrying a story. You could be president, a yoga teacher, a junkie, and you have this one completely unique thing in

your pocket. Your story. It may be crumpled like a bus ticket or writ large on tablets of stone, but it's yours. And God almighty you need to tell it, to rest in it, to find some peace with it... The first step is to take a breath and dare to entertain the thought that in the debris of your life would be stories worth examining. That they are... a kind of treasure... the only job in town that's truly ours is to be conscious of our own story."

-Martin Shaw - "Liturgies of the Wild"

It's that last line that particularly struck me. "The only job in town that's truly ours is to be conscious of our own story." To live my life in relationship to that profound truth means to be intentional about my life. To be faithful to each event in my life, both tragic and blessed, in order to understand the more profound treasure lurking beneath the surface and to live the remainder of my days in the light of what I have learned.

Without this perspective we are wandering like the Israelites, like Macbeth. Disconnected and blind to our own stories. Quick to evaluate and judge the stories of others, but utterly ignorant to the stories that God wants us to attend to in our own lives. We do this by contemplating the events of our lives, through prayer, confession to others, and relating the lessons of other stories to our own. From the simplest story for children, to the most profound myth, every story worth its salt contains an entire world of perspective and wisdom. To be sure, a bad story will be ham fisted and blunt with their message and can only deliver the narrow perspective of the author.

But a true story transcends the perspective of the author. It doesn't portray a simple truth, it portrays truth on a universal scale. These are the stories that are told and re-told throughout generations. Stories like the book of Numbers. And if a story is truly universal it means that we can find ourselves in them. Even though I live thousands of years apart from the Israelites, I speak a different language, and was raised in a culture worlds removed from them, I can find myself in this story if I am intentional. And by finding myself in this story, I can discover meaning in my own story, and through this meaning I might actually find growth.

Corrupting Our Past

"We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; "but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!" Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil. And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it. Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was greatly

aroused; Moses also was displeased. So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? "Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? "Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.'"

-Numbers 11:5-13

One of the biggest indications that the Israelites are not tending to their story is that they have completely misrepresented their own story. If we read these verses with no context, we would assume that the book of Numbers was closer to the story of Abraham than anything else. Abraham was a man who received the call of God to leave a life of comfort and luxury to journey into the unknown and build a life for himself and his family in accordance with God's will.

But this is a far cry from the story of the Israelites. They were not called out of a life of luxury and comfort, but instead a life of oppression and slavery. Their story begins with them crying out to God for deliverance:

"Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage."

-Exodus 2:23

None of this is acknowledged or expressed in Numbers 11. All that the people of God mention is the benefits of Egypt without reckoning with the reason why they left in the first place. The most telling phrase to me is verse 5, but while I quoted from the New King James Version above, I think that other translations put this point more clearly: *"We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost..."*

"At no cost". While it is true that they didn't have to pay for their food in Egypt, what they fail to mention is that this was due to their slavery not their prosperity. As slaves, they didn't have any money, they were given food by their masters, but this wasn't "payment" for their labor, it was the Egyptians tending to their slaves as someone would tend to a farm animal.

Whether we are aware of it or not, this is a common temptation for all of us. For a while I was under the false belief that my memories were to be trusted, that they gave me an accurate view of my past that was objectively true. I held this belief until I was doing research for my book on PTSD. One of the people I interviewed for my book was a

psychologist and neurologist who was performing research for a new medication at Banner University Medical Center in Tucson.

While talking to him about memory he said that most people think of their memory banks like memory on a computer. We “save” certain events to our hard drive, and we can “pull them up” at our convenience and then we close the file and move on. In reality, our memories are more like physical pictures contained in a photo album. They are blurry, have contrast issues, and the more we look at them, especially when we do so in the grips of extreme emotions, we are liable to bend the photos, to smudge the edges, and corrupt the image.

This is what we see here with the Israelites. In their current distress, they are recalling their memories of their time in Egypt. Because they are doing so in extreme emotionality though, they are corrupting their memories, seeing their past as something that it wasn't. We have a tendency of doing this as well. When we recall memories of our past, we either color them with nostalgia, or with rage, making them into fictional accounts as opposed to true memories.

Probably one of the best books that deals with the problem of nostalgia is “The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald. In this book, he tells the story of a young man named Gatsby who was born in poverty and fell in love with a beautiful girl named Daisy who ends up choosing a wealthy man over him. Over time, Gatsby attains his fortune and tries to woo Daisy away from her husband and into a relationship with him.

As you read through the book though, it is abundantly clear that Daisy is a stand-in for the unattainable. Because of this, Gatsby has made a fiction of his past, pretending that Daisy was something more than a pretty girl who also happened to be shallow and materialistic. Fitzgerald ends his book like this:

“Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further...And one fine morning—

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

-F. Scott Fitzgerald - “The Great Gatsby”

By making a fantasy of his past, he had been unfaithful to his own story. By doing this, he guaranteed that his future would always be a tragedy as he endlessly compared his current life to the fantasy of his past life. This is again the problem with Israel.

But we can do the same thing with bitterness and resentment, which is what we see in Moses. We have to remember that before God called Moses, he attempted to free the

Israelites by his own strength in Exodus 2. Even after this, at Mount Sinai, the people of Israel fell into Idolatry and God threatened to wipe them out and make a new nation out of Moses, this is how the exchange between God and Moses went:

“Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.” Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: “LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? “Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.”

-Exodus 32:10-12

Even though Moses, time and time again, intercedes for the people and takes upon himself the responsibility of tending to them, this is how he characterizes his role in this chapter: *“Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?”* Far from the labor of love that Moses willingly took upon himself, he now characterizes the people of Israel as an unfair burden that God foisted on his unwilling shoulders.

For Moses, this isn't nostalgia, it is bitterness. Moses is embittered at the thanklessness of the nation. He has sacrificed everything, risked everything, for them, and yet they are no more than three days away from Mount Sinai and they are already complaining. This, justifiably, fills Moses with bitterness and resentment towards the Israelites. However, just because Moses is justified in his anger, doesn't mean that what he is doing is correct. We must remember the words of James:

“...the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

-James 1:20

Even when wrath is justified, it is a poisonous burden for us to hold in our hearts. It threatens to corrupt our character, but it also threatens to corrupt our past. Moses is so bitter at these people that he has forgotten his own story. He has characterized himself as an unwilling sap as opposed to the truth that he was more like a noble hero. But since he doesn't want to live up to the nobility of his past self, he changes the story and demands that God change his position.

Taking the Wrong Lesson

By changing their past, both Moses and the people of Israel have taken the wrong lessons away from their past. Instead of the Israelites recognizing their story as one of

rescue, they see their story as one of extreme self-sacrifice. Instead of Moses seeing his story as one of savior, he instead sees himself as a hapless victim.

Because of this, the lesson that the Israelites take from their corrupted story is that they would have been better off if they never left Egypt. That they had boldly ventured out into the unknown at the cost of vast prosperity, but now that they see that this hasn't worked out, they wouldn't be wrong to return to the land of their prosperity.

But this is far from the correct lesson that they should have taken. The people of Israel are being rescued from a life of slavery and oppression, as such they need to learn gratitude and personal responsibility. Gratitude because literally every step of freedom has been through the miraculous work of God. They could have never freed themselves, just as they could have never provided for themselves in the wilderness. All of this was the work of God, given to them in response to their desperate cries for help and salvation. By being thankful to God, they would have remembered God's faithfulness in providing for them previously and trusted his continued providence in the future.

But also, they were helpless slaves in Egypt with no personal responsibility. As such, they didn't know how to take care of themselves or how to be free. So while they characterize themselves as poor victims in the above verses, the truth is that they are entitled and spoiled. Unable to take personal responsibility, and therefore unable to take care of themselves. When we understand these two points, we can understand why history is repeating itself for the people of God:

"Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not."

-Exodus 16:2-4

But we are also told in Exodus 16, that God didn't just give them manna, but also birds from heaven to provide them with meat as well:

"And in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD; for He hears your complaints against the LORD. But what are we, that you complain against us?" Also Moses said, "This shall be seen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the

morning bread to the full; for the LORD hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the LORD.”

-Exodus 16:7-8

When we read Numbers we often forget this fact. It is easier to be understanding of the Israelites when we imagine that they have been fed on mere Manna for over a year. But the truth is a little different, it seems as though, at least for a time, they were provided with meat from heaven as well as bread from heaven. But God seems to have cut off the meat for a time, in order to teach them the same lesson that the manna was supposed to teach them, the lesson that Moses spells out for them in the book of Deuteronomy:

“And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. “So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”

-Deuteronomy 8:2-3

God gave His people a small time of deprivation to learn dependence on God. To remember that the purpose of God is not to give us everything that we want, but instead to teach us what we really need, and what we really need is Him. This was also the motivation to go to the promised land. As the story goes it will become more and more clear just how much of Israel’s hesitancy was about their fear of fighting with the Canaanites. They were not prepared to fight for the land of promise and so much of their hesitancy was a mask for their fear.

This is another way we can be unfaithful to our own story. When we shield ourselves from negative motivations and provide convenient cover for our own moral failings. Once again, just listening to the Israelite’s story we would believe that they were more than willing to fight the Canaanites, they were just missing the bounty of Egypt or they were fearful for the safety of their children.

We will talk more about this next week when we discuss God’s punishment, but one of the reasons why God punishes them this time was because He was holding them accountable to the lesson that they should have learned. In other words, God granted the people mercy because they acted in ignorance, but after a year of miraculous provision, and knowledge that they would enter the land imminently, they were without excuse for their complaint.

Moses is in a similar category here. The real story of Moses is of a man who immediately takes on to himself too much responsibility, and then when he fails he runs from responsibility. We see this pattern in him at the beginning of Exodus when he kills an Egyptian task master. Later on the first martyr Stephen recounts Moses' action like this:

“And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. “For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.”

-Acts 7:24-25

Moses has a noble heart and a courageous will that allows him to act when no one else will. However, his compassionate soul is also sensitive to rejection and failure. So after he is rejected by his people, he spends the next forty years in the wilderness of Midian, in exile without hope of returning to his people. In fact, when God first calls Moses to speak, he refuses the call multiple times until God grants him a part of his request:

“But he said, “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.” So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said: “Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.”

-Exodus 4:13-14

This is the true story of Moses' life and the pattern that he is stuck in. He ping pongs between the extremes of taking all responsibility on his shoulders, and then none at all. This will help us understand why, when Moses first established elders within the nation it was good, and now it is a bad thing. The first time Moses did this, he was given wise counsel by his father in law:

“So Moses' father-in-law said to him, “The thing that you do is not good. “Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. “Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. “And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. “Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.”

-Exodus 18:17-21

Moses' father in law, lovingly, explained to Moses his folly, and Moses humbly accepted his correction and changed his leadership style. But in this story, in one statement by Moses, we see that he has fallen back into his pattern, the same pattern that will prevent him from entering the promised land:

“So Moses said to the LORD, “Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? “Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,’ to the land which You swore to their fathers? “Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, ‘Give us meat, that we may eat.’”

-Numbers 11:11-13

In the beginning of Moses' complaint we see him rejecting any responsibility for the people of Israel and even rejecting his call. But woven into the complaint, we see that he is simultaneously taking full responsibility for the complaint of the people of God when he says: *“Did I beget them, that You should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child...”* Because Moses doesn't know his own story, he doesn't even know his own calling.

God didn't call Moses to lead an infant through the wilderness, but a group of men and women that were supposed to be free. And he wasn't ever doing this alone. God was always doing this *through* Moses. It was God who sent the plagues, God who drowned the Egyptian army, God who delivered them through the Red Sea, and God who had provided the food for the nation. Yet in this passage, if we didn't have any context, it sounds like Moses is claiming that he had to do all this on his own, and that he was frustrated because he couldn't provide food for his people, but when did Moses ever provide food for his people?

We will talk more about Moses' punishment next week, but we can see the same thing in his story that we see in the nation of Israel. Because they have forgotten and warped their own stories, they have taken away from their experiences the wrong lesson and are being made worse by their trials, not better.

The Word of Their Testimony

“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. “And

they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”

-Revelation 12:10-11

Which leads to the final point, and that is the power and final purpose of our “testimony”. The word used here for testimony is related to the Greek word for witness, “martyr”. Over time, those who were “witnesses” of the ministry of Christ had to die for their testimony, and so we have associated this word with someone who is executed for their faith. But at the bottom what this word insinuates is that our story is not our own.

In other words, the Bible shows us that all of history is not humanity’s story, but God’s. God is in the beginning, mankind doesn’t show up until the end of the creation days. It is God who is glorified in the creation, and it is God who wills the creation of mankind in the first place. Man is the one who falls, and God is the one who redeems, He is the hero and main character of the entire story of creation.

That means that we have the honor and the privilege of participating in His great story, to turn our lives into a testimony of His glory and His reality. This is something that Moses understood in Exodus, but has forgotten in the midst of adversity:

“Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.” Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: “LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? “Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.

-Exodus 32:10-12

Moses doesn’t appeal to the desires of the people, but the desires of God. He recognizes God’s right to judge His own people, but he also expresses to God the truth, that God should reveal his mercy and glory through His people and not mere judgement and wrath. This is the story of each and every Christian. Our lives are now a testimony of God’s forgiveness and mercy, not a story of wrath and judgement, which is what we deserve. Our redemption was *through* the judgement of Christ, and now His victory is our victory, His righteousness is our righteousness and we have become one with Him and united our story to His.

“This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”

-2 Timothy 2:11-13

It is in this light that we know that our lives have eternal meaning. That even after our deaths, our lives will continue to be a testimony of the glory of God, and that is what we are building with our story. But we shouldn't get things mixed up. In order for our stories to impact others, they must first impact us. We must understand their meaning before our lives can truly speak of the reality of God in us.

This is something that we have forgotten in our current age. Most of our ancestors understood this point, which is why most cultures, pagan and Jewish, celebrated the stories of their ancestors. In the west though, we stopped telling the stories of our ancestors, and so we stopped telling even our own stories. People hid their shame and failures, they closed themselves off and sat on their stories without calling attention to themselves.

This was seen as noble and stoic, but it created a damaged and insulated society held together by secrets and things left untold. This showed up in our movies and tv shows in the 50's and 60's that were all superficial and happy without anything real within them. This gave way to our current era where we have done the opposite. Instead of internalizing our stories, we express them ad nauseum, but without understanding them first.

Take social media as a prime example. When people go through life they are going through it to *share* their experiences, not to live them. That is the focus of parties and events, to *capture* the moment instead of experiencing it first. Our lives are almost designed around public consumption and so we know our own stories less than our forefathers did. At least they sat in their sadness and grief, all we do is express our stories without first examining them, weeping over them, and learning from them.

I remember talking to a couple who were in the midst of a crisis and they said something like “we know that God will use our story to help other people.” At the moment I felt strange about their statement but didn't fully know why. Upon reflection I now know why.

Their story wasn't even over yet, they were still in the midst of a crisis and instead of thinking about what they could learn from it, they were already preparing it for mass consumption. And to be fair to them, they are merely reflecting what our society puts out

there. We are experiencing our own stories less and less, and we are consuming more and more shallow stories and gossip online than ever before. But this lack of depth reveals itself in our own anxiety, divisiveness, and lack of maturity. Once again, I think that Martin Shaw put this point fairly well:

“On the one hand we have more public confessions than ever—chat show, podcast variety—and at the very same moment we are drowning in a deficit of deeper meaning, deeper communication. Our addiction to the cult of I and the social mediums to communicate that I is no replacement for profound, dare I say it, soulful disclosure.”

--Martin Shaw - “Liturgies of the Wild”

To the person who is willing to take their story as seriously as possible, to genuinely see it as a participation in the grand narrative of this world, of innocence, corruption, loving redemption, death, and ascension, the story of Christ Himself. To them they are given the power to overcome, by the blood of the lamb and the power of their testimony. To be, not just awake and alive, but truly *conscious*, self-aware, ready to learn, and able to teach through the wisdom gained through a life of real experience.

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”

-1 Timothy 1:12-16