

# “What If God Wrote Our Biography?”

SERMON: Bethel Friends Meeting

March 3, 2024

Scripture: II Corinthians: selections from chapters 3 & 4

Matthew 6:12 “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”

My knowledge of movies is very limited, but I shall never forget a movie named *Love Story* in which Ali McGraw and Ryan O’Neal wrote their own marriage vows. The line that cannot be forgotten is when they said to each other, “Love means never having to say. I’m sorry.” How sadly wrong that is. The very opposite is true: Love means frequently having to say, “I’m sorry.” More and more often as I get older, I forget an appointment or a meeting, and I have to say, “**what cannot be excused can only be forgiven.**” The same is true when I forget birthdays! Forgiveness is the oil that keeps relationships from breaking apart.

This morning I have a question for you that I have recently asked of myself: “**What if God wrote your biography? What is the story of your life as God would tell it?**” Now we must admit that this would not depend on **our** version of our lives, or what we wanted to hide, because if God is the author, we have to live with the reality that God knows every thought, every word, and every deed since the day we were born—the good, the bad, and the embarrassing.

Now in thinking about this regarding myself, I believe that the biography that God would write has several chapters:

1. First, God would write up my life to this point—then and now or past tense and present tense. But God has foreknowledge; he also knows the “now and then.” His foreknowledge includes what ours does not—our future choices, circumstances beyond our control, heartaches, successes, and even our deaths. **Here is the catch: God can know our future including the number of our days, but it does not mean that he zaps us.** John Wesley’s mother taught him to distinguish between God’s foreknowledge and God’s predestination. His wise mother, Susannah, wrote to him at Oxford, “Son I know the sun will come up tomorrow morning; that is foreknowledge. But I will not make it come up.” **God can foreknow but we are not robots; we have free wills. For the most part, good choices will bring good consequences and bad choices will bring bad consequences.**

We must remember the nature of God. John the Elder wrote in I John that “**God is love.**” At every graveside service that I have ever led, I read from Lamentations 3: “*Though God allows grief, he will show compassion so great*

*is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.”* **I believe that death is a part of our being mortal. I do not believe that we die because God needs us more in heaven than our precious families do on earth.**

Internalize these precious words as we sing:

“Great is God’s faithfulness, O God our Father. Thou changest not;  
thy compassions, they fail not; morning by morning new mercies we see.  
Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, God’s own dear presence to cheer and to guide.  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all ours and ten thousand beside.

2. As my biographer, I think that God would point us to the foundational premise of our Christian faith. We find it on the first page of most Bibles! **Genesis 1:27** tells us that *we are created in God’s own image*. **Psalm 8:5** reminds us that *God made us a little lower than the angels and crowned us with glory and honor*. **Sin is our behavior, but it is not our identity; our identity is that God made us in God’s image. As well as we care for our bodies, He gave us dominion over the care of the earth and all the plants and animals in it as well as our morals, ethics, business ventures, etc.**
3. Thirdly, I think that, as my biographer and yours, by this chapter, **God would first insist that we stop putting ourselves down**. I think God would begin the interview by saying, “Don’t be overly modest. You need to count your blessings. Claim the reality that even with your mistakes and shortcomings, you have meant something good in the lives of more people than we ever realize. Don’t be negative. You need to give thanks for the people whom God put in your life to help you bear your burdens, to love you, and to open doors for you.”

I remember years ago seeing in a lady’s kitchen this motto: “Don’t be too hard on me because God made me and he don’t make junk.” We read in Luke’s Gospel (11:11-13) “*Which of you fathers, if your son asks you for a fish, will give him a snake instead? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?*”

4. I think the title of the fourth chapter of God’s biography of me would be a reminder that the first words most babies learn other than “Da-da” and “Ma-ma” are “mine” and “no.” We keep saying these words all our lives. Paul wrote in what we know as II Corinthians that “*we have this treasure in jars of clay.*” **We are all sinners saved by our faith in God’s grace. We need**

to allow God to save us. I heard one preacher preach, “I hope Jesus will know me.” Oh, he will! But he wants us to be prepared for eternity even when we go there prematurely.

We must repeatedly and consistently pray as Jesus taught us, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” part. We do not like to eat “Humble Pie” which is the diet for forgiveness. Can we? Do we want to? Yes, we need to patch up relationships that are broken. Have we?

Each of us needs to repent of our sins—sometimes deeds, sometimes words, sometimes just thoughts; but all sins. Now repentance is different from remorse. Remorse is simply being sorry, maybe even sorry that our sin was discovered. **But the Greek word for “repentance” is “metanoia.” It means turning around and going the other way. Repentance means stopping doing what is harmful to our body or our soul or our mind. From time to time, God nudges us with the reminder that we need to make some substantial changes in our attitudes or our decisions; so we must all ask, “What changes does God want me to make?”**

5. Just repenting and being saved is not the end of our journey with the Lord. We need to grow in grace. John Wesley called it “grace upon grace.” To put it another way, if I live in accordance with God’s will, what changes do I need to make in...

````how I treat my body,  
           what I feed my mind and soul,  
                   how I relate to some people whom I really don’t like much,  
                           and what homework do I need to finish with the Lord.

Repentance means opening up some old files that we do not want to look at.

- Who feels that we broke a promise? Do we owe them a long overdue apology?
- Whom did we disappoint the most? How can we bless them rather than hurt them?
- What secret sins are ghosts that haunt us like Ebenezer Scrooge’s did in Dicken’s “Christmas Carol”?
- What relationships need patching up? Can friendships be re-kindled?
- What habits do we need to stop? When you and I go to heaven, is God going to say, “Bless your heart, you came before I wanted you to because you abused the body I gave you.”
- What attitude can we change? Can we be less grumpy? Can we be less critical? Can we be more positive? Can we count out blessings and see how blessed we really are?

- What fears are bothering you to the point that you are not at peace with your future?
- These are some of the key areas of our lives where love means often saying, “I’m sorry.”

Then we must turn to I John in our Bibles where John the Elder wrote, *“If we cannot love each other whom we see, how can we love God whom we cannot see?”*

One of the books that was given to me when I was pastor of FUMC in Asheboro was the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm as seen through the experience of a shepherd who herded sheep. I learned in that book years ago a deep insight into the verse, “He anointed our head with oil.” In Palestine there was a fly that would lay eggs on the nose of sheep and the eggs would make their way into the sheep’s blood and it would slowly die. However, the shepherds all had an ointment, and if they anointed the sheep’s nose with the ointment, the flies would not lay eggs on the nose. Many things and some people poison us, but if the Holy Spirit anoints our head with a cleansing oil, our cup can still run over. Furthermore, in spite of our life’s toils and snares, “surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in God’s house forever.” Will we accept God’s anointing us with a forgiving spirit? We need God’s protective healing ‘ointment’ to prevent poison to hatch within us.

Our personal future and our church future can be better than our past if we internalize and practice the eternal truth that **Love means often saying to one another and to the Lord, “I’m sorry.”** It is the oil in every relationship that kills the eggs that will poison our spiritual bloodstream.

6. **Now we must come to the last chapter of our biography that God is writing.** It is the chapter entitled, “Now and then.” It is God’s foreknowledge of our future because of decisions we will make. God knows that chapter in his foreknowledge, **but he is leaving us the freedom to live it.**

God forgives us and nudges us to forgive each other. What will the next chapter of your biography have to report?

Amen? Amen.