

## **‘what is your story today?’**

A recent brain study compared two groups of people: good and bad sleepers. The bad sleepers relived past embarrassing situations at night. They could not let them go. They told themselves stories like, ‘I can’t believe I did this or that!’ The good sleepers weren’t telling themselves these stories. They had somehow ‘cleaned it all up’.

We are constantly telling ourselves stories. These stories are important and powerful. They affect much more than our sleep and our health. They affect our choices and our relationships.

If we talk about stories, we need to keep two things in mind.

First, our stories are part of being human— God has given us imagination. I do not mean fairy tales. We use their imaginations to figure things out. We tell stories about our past, present and future and how they fit together. Our imagination helps us interpret the world and respond to it. So stories can be good.

Second, humans have limited perspective. This means that our stories will always be limited. We need help to discern between reality and illusion. God is ready to give us this help.

Are you one of these bad sleepers? Have you ever struggled with reliving negative stories when you’d rather be sleeping at night? If so, you know that these stories often accuse us about our past. “I was so stupid to say that...”. We might feel a future threat: ‘What will they think of me now?’ these stories about the past and the future certainly affect us in the present.

And these stories do more than keep us from sleeping well. They can keep us from living well. We saw a sketch (toneelstuk) earlier. Eveline’s character had created entire scenarios that she was living by: “I’m so tired, this day will end in disaster. My boss is already disappointed in me. If I’m late I will make it worse... I’m sure I’ll be late..”

### **freedom**

God has given us great freedom. We can step back and from that distance take a look at the stories going on in our head. We can then decide which stories are really true. We decide then what to build on.

Here’s an example. Lans and I were in the Alps. Monday would be our big train day. As we prepared to go to the station, the hotel manager came to us. He asked if THE DUTCH CAR was our car in the hotel parking lot. Uh-oh. One of the other guests had accidentally scraped our car. Fortunately, this guest had come to the manager right away to confess this. The manager assured us that it would be fine; he said that the guest would be staying longer at the hotel. We decided to fill in the insurance forms later.

Once we boarded the train, I said to Lans, ‘how annoying, actually, that this thing with the car happened.’ And Lans responded as usual with great wisdom, “But that is not our story today’. True, I agreed. And because of that, I could enjoy the mountains again.

At the end of the day, though, my mind turned again to the car. I began to imagine scenarios and difficulties. When I shared this with Lans, he repeated the wise phrase, ‘But that is not our story today’. The phrase was as true then as it had been in the morning. But now I was tired and hungry. Somehow, I found that it was more difficult to shift my thoughts.

My worrying showed me something. The event had impacted me more than I had realized. I needed a story that would do two things: it would acknowledge what happened but would give me a bigger perspective. We do not live in denial as Christians. Life can be difficult. But

we can choose what to do with our stories. So, Imagine now that our negative stories are like leftovers in the refrigerator. Imagine that I tuck them away in the back and then ignore them. I won't see them anymore-- but before I know it, I'll smell them. They will become Biological experiments.

My worry of 'dealing with the car' had become the main story going on in my head. I had to deal with my worry. If I didn't, then the 'bigger story of who I am' would begin to stink. I might have started snarling at the driver who scraped our car. I could have continued to complain to Lans. Praise the Lord, I could eventually say this: "Yes, it's too bad that the car is damaged. But despite this mishap, God is good. He will help us. With his help, I can stay calm and be kind to the other driver."

**What does the Bible say?** Our imaginations play a role in many stories in the Bible. Here is one example. I'll share another in the sermon notes to the home-groups

**On Easter, two disciples travel from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus.** This is found in luke 24. They discuss the tragic death of their lord and friend Jesus. They think that their hopes are dashed. The main story in their head is 'failure'. Jesus himself joins them on the road, but They don't recognise him.

-- We shouldn't be too hard on them. We often DO NOT recognise the HOLY SPIRIT BECAUSE HE LOOKS SO familiar-- he works through our own THOUGHTS, through FRIENDS. --

So Jesus asks them: *why* are you so sad? What is your story?. He listens. Then puts their story in a much bigger story: yes there has been suffering and that looked like failure, but it is part of Gods plan to set humanity free. The big story is about victory.

Jesus and the two disciples arrive at an inn. When Jesus breaks the bread during the meal, the two recognise him. Jesus has entered their personal story. Jesus is alive! He will walk with us too. He will listen to us, too, and open our eyes to His story.

We've learned some things from the sketch. Before we talk about that, i want to thank our home group for their prayers and input. Eveline's character was learning to trust the voice of the 'good GPS'. She was discovering how the stresses of the journey don't have to define the journey. She was in a process of learning.

### **What can we do? What are the takeaways?**

I will state them briefly and then expand on them a bit. Briefly, they are three:

1. We are free to look at the stories going on in our head.
2. God offers us help to connect with our true story
3. We have a role to play to encourage others to see their real stories

Now I will enlarge on these using some examples.

**1. We are free.** Free to choose to live connected with God. Free in every moment. The enemy would have us think we are trapped in fear and condemnation. But Jesus sets us free. He offers us a choice: WHICH STORY do I LIVE BY?

**2. God offers us help to connect with our true story.** We naturally default to our old stories of failure and fear. Eveline kept repeating stories like, "it's a total disaster!" "My boss will never understand". The Holy Spirit walks with us. We use our freedom first to open up to God. He then sheds his light on our stories. He might help us reflect. He asked Eveline, Why do you think that way? When I was stressed about the car I could ask myself questions like

these: Is **this** the story I want to live by? What is this story doing to my soul and my emotions?

**How do we recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit?** The Holy Spirit always helps us see the true story of our lives: we are redeemed children of God. We don't have to be afraid. We don't have to judge others. Some song lyrics can help us: "You're a good good father, that's who you are; and I'm loved by you." What a comfort! Once we are safe in our connection to God, we can connect with others. This leads me to the third takeaway:

**3. we have a role to play to encourage others to see their real stories.** The disciples went back to Jerusalem to **encourage** the others. Once she began to trust the God-gps, Eveline's character began to **value** and **trust** other people.. As the body of Christ, we too can value and encourage each other. We can remind each other of the freedom we have — freedom to choose the story to live by.

To summarize: We open up to God and connect with him. We can learn to ask ourselves and each other, 'is this our story right now?' This is a lifelong process. So Let's encourage each other with the real, true story of who we are in the risen Christ. Our Lord has rewritten our stories. Amen.

### Homegroup notes

**The prodigal son** is still far away when he begins to figure out his story: he say, "I'm now starving. The servants on my father's estate all have enough to eat. I'll ask my father if I can just work for him as a servant; then at least I'll have enough food". As he walks home, he adds this: "I'm no longer worthy to be called son. I'll just tell my Father I know that." His story is all about his failure. He thinks his relationship with his father is broken. What really happens is that the Father breaks through the failure story with his love. He says "Son, I'm filled with joy that you're restored to me: let's throw a party, so everyone can share our joy." The father's story doesn't deny the pain. It transforms it. The Fathers story is a victory story of restoration.

Have you ever experienced that God helps you see one of your own 'stories' with fresh perspective? Can you describe how that went? What did you learn?

What are some of the smaller, everyday, stories you tell yourself that might limit you?

What are some practical things you can do to allow God's bigger story to shine light on your own limited stories?