

## Renewed by the Power of the Story

Some reading suggestions to help you stretch your thinking and see God in new ways

BY LARRY THIESSEN



Children have a special gift it seems. They have the wonderful ability to find adventure in just about everything. Their imaginations are wildly alive and it doesn't take much for them to enter the world of exploration. Watching a small child, barely able to stand, yet able somehow to bend and observe the smallest thing crawling across the pavement, can bring a smile to anyone's face.

A string, a ball, or better yet, a forest or field brings no end to the possibilities that can be experienced. Creative life is entered into without agenda or critique or fear. Life just 'is' and therefore ready to be embraced in all its unpredictability and beauty.

Somewhere along the way we tend to lose this ability. Without knowing how or why, our imaginations tend to atrophy over time and we find ourselves living in a world of facts and deadlines and decisions and challenges.

Entering into some new adventure may even seem a bit irresponsible. So we stick to what we know and hope it all turns out in the end.

Is there a way to overcome this? Is there a way to re-enter the world that we knew as children? What did Jesus mean exactly when he said that we needed to be like children to really understand and experience the Kingdom?

One way we can re-ignite our imaginations is to rediscover the 'power of story,' for in the grand stories, both past and present, we enter into something larger than ourselves and by doing so, we find ourselves. Why is this? I think it's because the best stories are the kind that reach deeply into the human condition and stretch our thinking beyond the boundaries that contain our present existence.

Themes of life and death, love and loss, spiritual light and darkness dominate the great stories. And here

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is the main point: the great stories don't seem to end. When that last page is turned you just know there is much more life to live, much more to explore and experience. Sort of like our lives, wouldn't you say?

So how do we recapture these great stories and in so doing, regain our creative selves? First, I would suggest starting with a fresh approach to reading the Bible. Whether you realize it or not, we tend to read the Scriptures looking for principles and precepts to help us live better. We start with story

# We do well to rediscover the great stories contained in the great books

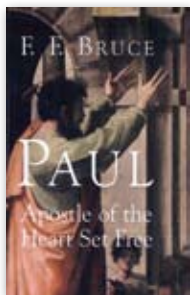


(as children) and often end with facts. Nothing wrong with that of course, but when one pulls back from that way of reading and enters into the world the Bible was written in, principles take on new meaning.

Step back a bit and try to imagine what was really going on. Try to think past the obvious. Try to see the story from the thirty thousand foot level and see how it comes alive. The Bible is really all about story and we do well to enter into it with our ‘eyes wide open and our hearts unafraid.’

Take the Apostle Paul for example. If you are at all familiar with the New Testament, you know that Paul wrote much of it—mostly letters to churches to help them understand this new faith they had embraced. If we see these letters as statements of faith only, we can miss the bigger, bolder story.

These letters were often written, perhaps even scrawled out, in unlikely places—on ships, on foot, on horseback, in prison. They are filled with the kind of urgency that one finds when one is working hard to get a message across. But it was the story that Paul found himself in that prompted these letters. Try to imagine his life beyond the few facts that are written about him. To guide you in this let me recommend:



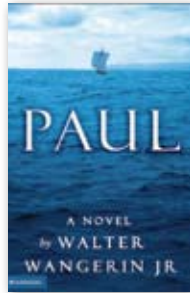
## PAUL: APOSTLE OF THE HEART SET FREE

by F. F. Bruce

This book was written years ago and represents the depth and beauty of Paul’s life

and letters. What makes this book so good is that Bruce tells Paul’s story and intertwines his letters within the context of the events in

Acts. It’s a challenging book to read but very much worth the effort.



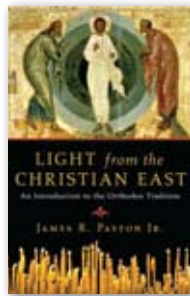
## PAUL

by Walter Wangerin

No one spins a better tale than Wangerin. This book completes his *Book of God* and *Jesus* trilogy and tells Paul’s

story in a creative way that will take you into his life like no other.

Then, take a look at church history. Now there is a story! Two thousand years of story—good and bad. We tend to get caught up in our own small stories and forget the furnace from which they have been forged. Our story begins in the East and it’s to that story (Turkey) that many of you will journey next year. It’s a story most of us know very little about. To engage your thinking you might try:

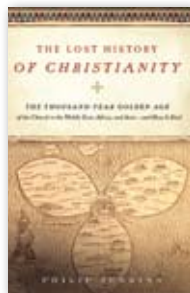


## LIGHT FROM THE CHRISTIAN EAST

by James Payton

This book reviews the history and teaching of the Eastern Orthodox branch

of Christianity—the branch that still exists in Istanbul.



## THE LOST HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

by Philip Jenkins

You may find in this book a bit more than you bargained for, but it will give

you an interesting perspective on the longevity of the Christian story as it spread across the early centuries.

Finally, dig into a biography of one of the pioneer missionaries—men and women who risked everything to expose humanity to the grand story of God and his love for the world. Life and death, faith and doubt. Themes that permeate any great story. My all time favorite is **To the Golden Shore: the Story of Adoniram Judson** by Courtney Anderson but there are many, many to choose from. Or if you are eager for something more robust try **Hawaii** by James Michener. This fictional epic will give you a good introduction to the life and perils of missionary work.

Most children love to hear and read stories—over and over again. We do well to rediscover the great stories contained in the great books. As we join our story to the larger story we become more alive somehow. We see God in new ways as we understand more fully that he has been engaged with humanity for a very long time.

So go ahead, pick up a good story, engage your imagination, and enter a new world. Who knows where your adventure will take you. But no matter where it goes, God will be in that story. That’s a promise. ☪

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