

When God Defends

The Storyweaver is always at work. He moves long before we even know our need and uses our story lines generations later. Each of the stories you hold now in your hand started long before the events I recorded here. Yours and mine did, too! I had great-grandparents who were both pastors and supporters of missions. They raised my grandmother and her brothers to be in ministry, and our reunions were always full of hymn singing and people asking each other, "How's it going with your soul?" All of that played a part in my serving as a missionary.

Sometimes God uses the good in our stories to prompt us to do more good, and sometimes he uses the hard, to show us there is another path. Either way, we can be confident "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). One of the hard parts of my story is I lost my dad to cancer. This loss is not necessarily any easier today than it was when it happened, but I have seen God use it as I talk to fatherless children around the world. It's just one example of how he uses all of our story, all of the time.

And there are so many story lines happening at once! I have story lines as a writer, wife, mother, missionary, friend, sister, daughter, aunt, and the list goes on and on.

You have lots of story lines going on as well, story lines at school or at co-op, story lines in your family, in your neighborhood, in your church, on your sports teams or in your music groups. God is also weaving you into the lives of children around the world, with each prayer you utter and each dollar you share!

There aren't just story lines we can see today, but story lines from the past that brought your parents together, that brought you to the town you are in, or to the school you attend. There are story lines in the future—people and places

you will visit and be called to serve or share with.

With all of that epic storytelling going on, it's a good thing there is a Storyweaver we can trust to keep it all straight!

Just take a closer look at some of the story lines of the people you met in this book.

The people who gave Jorani a home during her healing and restoration from slavery were from a group founded in 2001, back when Jorani was still living happily with her parents as a little girl. God saw her need ahead and stirred his people to action in preparation for Jorani's story and many others like her. Lots of relationships went into her rescue and restoration. Read the following real-life letter she wrote to her sponsor who helped pay her expenses while she was learning about sewing . . . and Jesus:

How is your family? I am very well. I was very, very happy on Christmas day. I know that your family was also happy on Christmas day. I am going back home in January 2012. I am very excited when I knew that I am going back home soon.

The reasons that I am very happy to go back home are:

- First: I can look after my grandmother.*
- Second: I can open my small sewing business.*
- Third: I am very very happy because I can help my family.*

I want to say thank you for you to be my sponsors. Thank you so much for your love. I love your family so much and I am going to remember all of your love that have given to me.

Jorani doesn't know what her future holds, but she knows God has a plan for her.

We can stay a part of her story line and other rescued slaves by praying for their re-entry into their families or villages,

for their health and the healing of their memories. We can pray they can grow and develop a healthy family. Most important, we can pray they understand their Defender God loves them deeply.

I have a God-story in my own family that made me eager to share Joseph and Ben's. It was in 1997 that I first heard the beat of my adopted son's heart in my own. I didn't know his name, I didn't know how old he would be or when he would come, but much like a mother can feel a baby kick, I felt him kick in my heart. He was real to me, and I wanted to meet him.

Evan came into our family as a baby the next year and is now in high school. His story line blending with mine is one of the greatest blessings God has ever given me! I love how God knew that although Evan was born in another country, he was always intended to be my son. As anybody who has gone through an adoption will tell you, there are too many details that have to come together for there not to be a Storyweaver orchestrating it all!

Ben and Joseph's parents had to find themselves at the same place in the same time, fall in love, get married, have a heart for adoption, then Ethiopia, then not just for one, but for two—and all at the exact time Ben and Joseph, in separate stories, were released for adoption.

Whew! All of that doesn't just happen! And though we may read about them and think God wrote that story just for their family now, I'm sure their story will go on to impact Ben's future grandsons and Joseph's future neighbors or employees. God brought them here to set off events we can't even imagine yet! He knew he wanted those stories told in this setting, so he took the hard and used it for his good.

That's God's way. He can't help but redeem and repair and reconcile and restore and rescue. It's his Defender nature.

We all have things that make life challenging for us. In Antonio's case, some of those things are obvious when you meet him; for many others, those things are hidden. We might be shy, or struggle taking tests, or feel anxiety for no reason; we might have trouble reading, or have severe allergies. None of us is struggle-free. One of the reasons Antonio's life touches everyone around him (and everyone who reads or hears his story) is that he reminds us that each person, in God's eyes, is deeply valuable.

It's why I love the Bible story of Mephibosheth, a young disabled boy who was the son of Jonathan and the grandson of King Saul. After his father died, he was forgotten and left behind. But he, like Antonio, was rescued, and was given a new family, and a place always at the king's table. Our Defender-Kinsman defends the value of all people and gives us way more than what others think we are worth, and certainly more than we deserve. We can follow his example and do the same!

I can't wait to see what God is going to do through Antonio, but it's not to be measured by human standards. He doesn't ever have to do something great for us to say, "Ahh . . . now I understand why he was spared." He was spared simply because God loves him as his son and has stories still to be told through him on earth. Once those stories are over, God will bring him home. Antonio can't earn that kind of love and doesn't deserve it. None of us does—and that's the miracle.

Caitlyn's story moved me while I was writing it, because I could picture her, sitting in her room, listening to the chaos around her, wondering if there was a God and if there was, did he even notice her? Meanwhile, unbeknownst to her, God was moving in Sheryl's heart, walking her family through a path to prepare them for Caitlyn's story line. He not only saw her, he was coming to her rescue!

Psalm 68:6 says, “God places the lonely in families” (NLT). This family is a living testimony to that truth! And to think, God used Sheryl’s past, the other foster children that had been in her home, a relationship from church, a couple of big brothers—all of it to accomplish his purpose. Once again, that is an awful lot of storyweaving!

There are children like Caitlyn and her brother Cameron all over the U.S. Almost half a million children live in foster families, or group homes, right in our communities. They are all around us and we don’t have to travel anywhere to begin to bring them into our story lines. How might you be able to pray for them, share with them, or include them in your church or small group? What kinds of things do they need physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, or educationally? And what do you have to offer them? These are all great questions for you to talk about with your parents or church leader.

And if you are a foster kid now, this message is for you too! There is a God who loves you and wants to be your Father. There are people who want to help you be all that he created you to be. Find those people and hang on to them. Tell them your worries. Tell them your ideas. And ask them to be your partner in helping other kids in your own country . . . and beyond!

One of our staff members, Chris Cox, shared with me the following story, about an American girl like Caitlyn:

In a small church in Peebles, Ohio, a woman was given a vision from God to start a soup kitchen. After a miraculous launch to this ministry, a local children’s home asked this woman for help from her soup kitchen. She connected them to her church and her church offered scholarships to children from the home for one week of church camp. Tina was one of three girls from the children’s home sent to camp.

When she arrived at the event, she wanted to go home

immediately. She kept saying, "This isn't for me . . . it's just too much, too big." Her leaders coached her into staying the first night. On Monday she still wanted to go home, so I (Chris) met with her. As I do with any student who wants to go home, I asked her to trust me for twenty-four hours, and if she hated it by dinner on Tuesday, I would recommend that the directors of the home come and pick her up. That night the message spoke to Tina. She heard God speaking into her heart, telling her that her past didn't define her value. She went to bed that night with more peace than she had experienced in a long time.

On Tuesday morning her first experience was a Justice Station, set up with 200 pictures of Back2Back orphan kids that students could pray over. She was invited to write a letter to the B2B kids, telling them how God had revealed himself in her life. Tina wrote to Busheera, a child in India, of how she was an orphan too, how she had been abused by her dad and stepdad. She told her of her drug use, attempted suicide, and then her reconciliation to God.

In her own words, "I promise you that everything you're going through now is only gonna make you a better and stronger person. . . . You're never alone, so when you're down or need someone to talk to, you can write me or just talk to the man who gave his life for us, so we wouldn't have to."

The Storyweaver wove the soup kitchen lady into the life of the church, into the life of the children's home, into the life of Tina, into the life of Chris and her leaders, into the life of Busheera, and now into our lives, and ultimately into life with him!

I am grateful I see life as a story, and I hope you are too! It helps me when I wake up to decide what to do. I ask myself, "What makes a better story?" When things get hard (and they do and they will), I remind myself there are more chapters to

come—and the best stories have conflict.

God is using you! And will continue to do so, if you just say yes. That's my goal, to say yes every morning to whatever he brings me. Yes to praying for someone else, when it's easier to just list my own needs. Yes to giving money or things or time or myself, when I don't always feel like it. Yes to going across the street and greeting someone I don't even know, and think I don't have time for. Yes to serving him, even if it requires getting dirty or getting sick or getting into situations where I have no control. Yes to being a part of the work of the Defender God.

Excerpt from *Tales of the Defended Ones* by **Beth Guckenberger**, ©2013 Standard Publishing, used with permission. Beth Guckenberger and her husband, Todd, are the founders of Back2Back Ministries (based in Cincinnati, Ohio), which communicates a lifestyle of service by sharing the love of Christ and serving God through service to others.