

# The Word and the Storyteller

## by Emilee Breanne Ward

Stories have a way of capturing the heart and mind like nothing else. They stick with us longer than any lecture and tend to form our views of the world. The impact that they can have effect nearly everyone and Wren was no exception. She craved story and was absorbed in the pages of books most days. She also wasn't discriminatory with how she consumed stories. She listened to audiobooks, watched movies, binged TV shows, and wrote her own works of fiction.

Wren passionately consumed these things. She knew that her gifts for reading and writing must be God given and she sought ways to use these gifts to the best of her ability. She told Bible stories to the kindergartners at her church, wrote scripts for their Christmas productions, and did her best to support the artists within and without her church.

She was confident in her calling and confident in her God but, in the evenings when she was all alone, the voice of The Deceiver would sometimes whisper to her.

"This is all pointless." He said on an evening when she thought she was tired enough to sleep peacefully. "What place does story have in the Kingdom of God?"

She sat bolt upright in her bed, cold sweat coating her skin and her heart racing. The darkness around her pressed hard into her body and she could feel the isolation and hopelessness of this life consume her heart.

"Lord..." She whispered. "Lord...Lord...Lord..." This was all she could muster for her fear was great. Her heart loved story and the thought that there was no place for her gifts in heaven made eternity seem bleak.

"I must have made the arts an idol." She thought to herself and wept into the sheets. She repented and found herself wrapped in enough peace and exhaustion to finally rest.

Over the next few months, she was afraid to help with creative endeavors around the church and community like she used to. People reminded her how much she was missed and insisted that her unique voice was necessary to further the kingdom.

"But what if I'm too prideful? What if the Lord wants me to be more humble in my pursuits?" Wren had asked an older woman in her church one day.

The woman, who's name was Beth, said, "But, darling, God would not have given you those gifts if He didn't intend for you to use them."

As Wren went to bed that night, she was feeling more like herself and ready to continue using her gifts for the Lord.

But the voice of The Deceiver was strong in her ears again. "In an eternal paradise, there is no room for story. Imperfect tales of sinful men overcoming obstacles will not be allowed in a perfect place. You'll simply be a mindless drone in worship of your creator. How boring..."

The hands of darkness constricted her heart and made her cry out to the Lord, "I am so afraid. I don't want to lose this joy in my life. I want to create. I want to tell stories." It seemed so silly to her that she was upset over this but she didn't want to lose this precious thing.

"Lord," She whispered again, tears muffling her words. "if I must give up my love of this, help me. You are most important and if..." She paused to allow a sob to stumble out. "...if I must learn to accept eternity without stories then I will for You."

This time, the peace of the Lord enveloped her again and the exhaustion from crying enabled her to fall asleep.

The next morning, she wasn't sure how to function in this new direction of obedience. She was finding her heart filled with joy at the thought of reading a new book or continuing work on a creative project at her church but, when this feeling happened, she would pause. It didn't seem right to be finding this much joy in something that wasn't the Lord.

“Thank You that I get to do this. It is You I long to find joy in and not what is before me.” She whispered as she helped build a set for her church’s most recent theatrical production she had helped write the script for.

Her friend Nathan noticed her stoicism and bent down beside her moments later. “Where is that joy that usually follows you? You seem sad today.”

Wren explained how she was feeling and confessed that she was truly struggling. The more she spoke, the more Nathan’s face crinkled up in concern.

When she was done speaking, he finally said, “In Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 it says, ‘I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man.’” Nathan paused to allow the words to take root in her then said, “It’s fine for you to enjoy your work and to enjoy what you do. He wants us to take pleasure in all we do. You are extremely blessed that you truly love what your work.”

Wren smiled sheepishly and thanked him.

When she made it home that night and settled into bed, The Deceiver did not speak to her for she was too tired to listen. She fell into a deep sleep and dreamed a vivid dream.

She was before the pearly gates and she knew in her heart of hearts that she hadn’t died in her sleep. Even though the gates were magnificent, there was something about them that made her think they were coming from her own imagination. She walked towards the gates and they slowly opened to allow her access.

She walked along a cloud lined golden road until she was at the center of the city square where her Lord sat on a jewel encrusted throne. She could barely see any features on His face because light was beaming out from Him and lighting the entire city. She fell to her knees before Him.

“Wren.” The Lord said warmly.

Her face chanced a glance up at Him and listened attentively. “Yes, Lord?”

“You are so distraught. What troubles you?” He asked.

“What do You mean?” Wren asked, trying to keep her head bowed low.

“Look at me, dear one.” He said softly.

She obeyed and felt tears pricking the corners of her eyes as she gazed at His majesty. “I have made my gifts an idol but I am struggling to give them up.” She wanted to say more but she was so in awe of Him that she couldn’t continue

She could see Him smile as he replied, “The evil one can use the gifts I give as weapons against Me. At times, I have seen you stray but that does not mean I don’t want you to use your gifts for my glory. The times you volunteer at church and use story to bring the Gospel to others is obedience. That time you spend reading and enjoying the arts, grows your skills and knowledge of the written and spoken word. You are stewarding what I’ve given you wisely and I am well pleased with that.”

Wren’s breath caught in her throat. She wanted to thank Him but that seemed to be unimportant in this moment as she stood before Him. Her limbs trembled and so did her mouth. She could feel tears of joy coming.

“But why do I do this if I cannot use my gifts to serve in eternity?” She blurted out, her voice quaking slightly. She was ashamed as she said, “The Deceiver told me that story has no place in Your Kingdom. Since he was here in Your kingdom before he was cast out of heaven, I thought he might know...”

“He may know many things about Me but he never tells the full truth.” The Lord said firmly. “I am the Word. Every Word I spoke at the beginning of time brought all you know into existence. I am the original storyteller and I give that piece of me to all my children so they will tell the Gospel story to all.”

“But, Lord...” Wren began. “In eternity, won’t that become boring? Telling the same story over and over?”

Her Lord did not look angry but he was firm when He said, “You know very little, my child. When you come to your eternal home, you won’t be worried about what you will do with eternity. I have so much more to share with you that will make beautiful stories to tell. You will see things you have never seen on Earth and will be inspired to create and create.” He stood then and stepped down off the raised platform housing His throne. He closed the gap between them and wrapped her into His loving arms. “You will continue to tell stories and you will never wonder if you are doing My will because you will be in My presence always. I will delight in the stories you tell and I will sing songs over you, for I have gifted you with the ability to honor Me with your words.”

Wren trembled as she wrapped her arms around her Heavenly Father. The warmth and the peace she felt were so real in the dream that she began to sob. “What must I do now?”

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” He said, repeating a Scripture she had committed to memory when she was in middle school. “I will direct your steps. Commit all you do to Me and I will take you places you never imagined as you further My Kingdom.”

The image before her began to get fuzzy and she found herself regaining consciousness again. She awoke slowly in the sleepy morning light of her bedroom and clutched at the tops of her blankets. As she blinked a few times, her brain buzzed with all she had dreamed. Determined to remember what had happened, she grabbed a notepad from her bedside table and began scribbling furiously.

At the back of her mind, she was unsure if she had seen a true vision from the Lord or if He had simply used her active imagination to speak to her. But in either case, she knew He was coming to Wren to remind her of the right path and reassure her that the arts have their place in God’s Kingdom.