

The Power of Story with Gwynne Gardner Season 2 | Episode 14

Opening

Wayne: Welcome friends to the Everyday Disciple Makers podcast. Josh, it's great to be with you in the studio today.

Josh Yates: Absolutely. It's a joy to, to join you on this wonderful fall drippy afternoon in the Pacific Northwest.

Wayne: It is, the leaves are changing. It looks beautiful. And you are this weekend taking a trip with your family and intentional retreat. Can you tell us some more about what you're doing this weekend?

Josh Yates: Yeah, Wayne. You know, sometimes we, we I'd like to kind of talk about some of the things we do just as we're regular humans, things trying to be intentional leading our families.

And that was probably about six months ago. You had your family kind of retreat intentional living. And so that's a huge value for me, huge value, actually wells for Sonlife. How, how do we intentionally lead others, but as well as in our home, so we can't be winning at work and losing a home.

We have to figure out ways to. To lead our families. These are kids to, to follow in Jesus. And so this was modeled to me by other friends and mentors of mine but just to kind of get away. And to find creative ways of, of imparting really scripture and Jesus into my, into my family. And so, like I was a youth pastor I'll put together themes and I would create a way to, to lead my students.

But what can I do to intentionally lead the home. So a number of years ago, it was probably about 16 years ago. Thought through what does it, what does it mean to be a Yates? And and this time my son hadn't been born yet and we're praying through our future family. And we were praying through what God's doing in our marriage.

And I said, okay, if there's something I want my, my future kids to know the legacy I'm a lead is what is a Yates. And so we broke down Yates as a, as a kind of an acronym. Meaning something. So Y is I want, I want my kids to yearn for God, and then A, I want

them to be ambassador of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lord want to be an ambassador?

Okay. Why a, can I spell my name? Right. Okay. Why a T? Okay. T I want them to be a teachable learner, like want them to to grow and to learn to be teachable and, to grow. And then E is to be empowered by the Spirit and then asked us to be a servant leader. So this year is for us, we're, we're focusing this year 2022 on what it means to be empowered by the Spirit we're on the letter E and by the time our kids got our home, they've kind of rotated through, you know, those that are our last name.

So you can come to my son or my daughter and say, what's a Yates and they'll rattle that off. And so we're going to pray and evaluate, spent some time thinking about what does it mean to be empowered by the Spirit? This coming year.

Wayne: That's really cool. And I love that intentionality that gained away. I think sometimes. I've I've restored like that. And I'm like, man. That's a lot. And, and for listeners, we just want you to know, like, this is, this is something Josh does, the values trip was something I do. But there's like small ways everyday that we're also just intentional the time with our family.

One thing that, that me and my family do on Monday nights after we have dinner together, we read a chapter of Scripture. We've read through a couple of epistles. Last night we started reading in. The beginning of the book seemed like a good place. So there are intentional things that we can do that are big things, but there's also like daily or weekly ways to be intentional with friends, with family as you walk toward Jesus together.

And I don't think it would work for me, Josh to take my last name and, and do that because my kids aren't in the house for that long. I got, I got 10 letters and one of them's a Z I guess we could be zealous. We could be zealous. That could be. Being a Wrzesinski.

Josh Yates: Yeah, that's a good, that's a good reminder, Wayne. You know, you have to find out what you know, the shoe that's going to fit for you. And I think the idea is what are you, what can you do to creatively intentionally lead your family and fits on a weekly rhythm, an annual rhythm something that we need to do.

But it's funny that when we've been doing this for so many years, that now our kids absolutely love it. They love the, they love to find the time where we there's no devices, no TVs. Oh, we read, we, we laugh, we play, we you know, make a good meal. We bake

cookies. We just spend some time just together. And it has become really a, a really a retreat for our family.

That's grown over. Really love it and enjoy it. So yeah, I'm not saying, Hey, you know, copy and paste, but I'm saying, Hey, take the principles and what can, what can ways that you can lead your.

Wayne: Yeah, that's that's really, really cool. Thanks for sharing that. And listeners, thank you so much for taking some time today to listen to this episode of the podcast.

If you like it, we we'd love if you leave us a review, wherever you listen to podcasts, or if you'd share it with friends, ministry leaders in your lives.

And today's conversation is with Gwynne Gardner and Gwynne works with Josiah Venture, which is a part of Concentric, which is a worldwide Alliance of disciple-making ministries.

And Josiah Venture is our, is our partner over in Eastern and Central Europe. So enjoy this conversation with Gwynne.

Conversation with Gwynne

Wayne: Well, Hey there, Gwynne. Thank you so much for taking some time to have a conversation with me today.

Gwynne Gardner: You're so welcome.

Wayne: Well, Gwynne. My first question really is what is Josiah Venture and what is your role with Josiah venture?

Gwynne Gardner: Oh, good question. What is Josiah Venture? So Josiah Venture is a nonprofit organization and we work with young people in Central and Eastern Europe. We're in 16 different countries. And the vision of Josiah Venture is a movement of God among the youth of Central and Eastern Europe that finds its home in the local church and transforms society.

And then the mission is to equip young leaders to fulfill Christ's commission through the local church. So we're all about young people and the local church transforming society. God's movement. So there you go.

Wayne: that is awesome. And, and what, what do you do inside Josiah Venture?

Gwynne Gardner: Oh yes. My role. So my current role with venture is I'm the social media manager. So I manage our Instagram page, our Facebook or YouTube channel. And I'm also the host of our podcast called Josiah Venture stories. So I do a lot of things and it's really exciting for me.

Wayne: Now, now my guess is as a, as a little girl, your dream wasn't to grow up and be the social media manager for Josiah venture. So what, what led you, How did you get to where you are today?

Gwynne Gardner: How did I get here? That is a long story. So first of all, I I've lived in the Czech Republic for a little over a year. So currently I'm working with the international team. The international team is here in the Czech Republic. But before that I lived and worked in Sylvania for eight years. Also with Josiah Venture .

Doing more local youth work with fusion, our rock choir music ministry. And I was doing that for about five years. And at the five-year mark, I really felt like the Lord was placing a new challenge before me. I wanted to be challenged in a new way, and I have a background in communications in graphic design and different things like that.

And I really felt like I needed to start a communications team in Sylvania. So we have the international communications team, but they focus more on like bigger picture, like planning conferences and designing things for camps we do, but they're not really focused on the various countries. They help equip the various countries, but within Slovenia, I wanted to start our own communications team to produce materials that were in Slovene and the local language.

So I started this team with my friend and coworker. He's a Sloven guy named and he's actually now the director of the communications team. But we started it because he had photography and video skills, but I had the, the storytelling skills and more of the graphic design skills and things like that.

So I started that team and that was going well for like three years. And then I felt another stirring, another change in the horizon, as I kept thinking about how no one was doing what we were doing in Slovenia, like for all of Josiah Venture, specifically in the area of

social media and as an organization who works with young people, I was like, the young people are on Instagram, they're on Facebook, they're using these tools.

So how do we use these tools and be where they are? And so I had. Lots of different conversations, but I had a conversation with the director of the international communications team. And I was like, is there space for me on this team, to really focus on social media.

Cause they had been doing it, but more in a random way, occasional way. And I was like, we need to be more consistent and do it in a more consistent way. And I was like, I would love to do that. And I felt like my, my time in Slovenia, after eight years was coming to a close and it was like a natural seam in life and all different kinds of things.

But so that I moved up to the Czech Republic to start this, and it was. Three years ago, I had the idea to start a podcast and I was like, ah, I think we should start a podcast. And my boss was like, who do you think should host that podcast? And I was like me,

so.

Wayne: great. Now I love that. You're just willing to follow where God is leading and willing to do. Make those changes as you need to do what he has put on your heart. I listened to, and I love the Josiah Venture Stories podcast. And I love that you're having folks on the team just come and share their stories.

What do you think that it's important for us to share stories of what God is doing in our lives?

Gwynne Gardner: Oh man. I could talk forever about this topic, so I'll try and keep it short, but I believe that story really important. I believe that stories help us to get to know someone. And I have a friend who would always start conversations with a new person with what's your story? Like, instead of asking, oh, tell me about yourself or who are you?

She would ask. What's your story? And I really liked. Question. Because that word, the word story comes from the word history in the word, history and story makes you think of like it's connected to legend and adventure. And so when you ask someone their story, you're really like asking them to tell you what's the adventure of your life, where, what are the ups and downs, the challenges, the good times, the bad times, like those kinds of things.

So I also think like God is using our stories in powerful ways, and we each have our own unique story and we're created with purpose and God has a good plan for our lives. And so whenever we hear someone else's story, we're given the opportunity to learn from that person. And then their stories can inspire us.

Challenge us influence us, teach us and connect us emotionally with that person. So I've always enjoyed a good story. And so when we hear stories of what God is doing, in other people's lives. Like it points it's points us to Jesus. And I've been told like my whole life that your, your testimony is a really powerful tool and sharing the gospel because no one can say, oh, that didn't happen to you.

It's my story. Like, this is what happened in my life. And so when you say, when you ask someone. Hey, can I tell you how God has changed my life? Usually they're willing to, to listen, they're interested. And so then once when you're telling your story, you're pointing to the bigger picture, the bigger story that God is telling through our lives.

So anyway, I, yeah, I could go on and on, but I just love how God uses our stories and he's the greatest author ever. So.

Wayne: That's great. I love it. And I think sometimes for me, I have the, the thing you know, salvation testimony of my parents who were in church. And then when I was seven, I decided I want Jesus in my heart. So.

I stopped sending all my horrible sins that I had as a seven year old and think sometimes, you know, for, for people who grow up like that were like, man, I don't have that, that amazing story.

But really just means I need to think, because from the time I was seven until now, which is. A long time because I'm 40, like God has been working in our stories is more than that. This is my salvation testimony part. Like that's a part of your testimony, but the continued work that God is doing in our lives is so cool to be able to, to share with others.

Following up with that is, is there a danger when we share our stories of, of making ourselves the focus of making it about me instead of pointing to God and how can we kind of work with that?

Gwynne Gardner: Oh my gosh. Yes. I actually think for sure, because we are prideful humans. I think that we want to be the hero of our own story. We want to be the focus. You want to be the main character, but for me personally, the more that I began to like tune my life, tune my heart, mind, soul story to the life of Christ.

Like I wanted to make him the focus and I wanted to point more people to him. Cause I also think, like you're saying that I also became a believer when I was four years old. I was really young. I was raised in a Christian home and I always thought like, my story is lame and then you start comparing your story to someone else.

And so there's that danger as well. Danger of comparison. Like why is it my story, like theirs? And then there's that danger of pride coming in of like, well, at least I'm not them, you know, like all kinds of things. And so I think when we can shift the focus and can totally be like, God, you are working in my life, just like you're working in that person's life.

And instead of I had to learn the lesson of instead of comparing my story to celebrate, like celebrate what God was doing in my life and celebrate what they're, what he's doing in their lives. And cause there is that danger 100%. Like we just want to be like, look at me, look at me. But really it's like, look at me through the lens of Christ.

Look what Christ is doing in my life. So yes, there is that danger.

Wayne: I love your thoughts on that. And that's, yeah, it's good. It's easy. I mean, I, I, I make some videos and I do things to share my life and it's not, it's not because I think I'm great because I actually often don't think I'm that great. I have the opposite issue. But yeah, like wrestling with that tension of like, I, I want more people to listen to this podcast.

I don't want people to watch this video, not because. I want to be famous or I want to be cool because I want to be able to share what God is doing in my life. And just, just balancing that, that tension. I know some guys who, you know, just never share anything on Facebook, except for scripture verses. I'm like, yeah.

But like then, like people won't connect with you because you're not a human there.

Gwynne Gardner: Right.

Wayne: so finding that balance

What is, what is, what is the super power? What is the superpower of storytelling. Why does it work so well? Why does it connect?

Gwynne Gardner: Oh I think it connects because. It connects to our emotions and it's stories give emotion to information. So it's not just like, blah, blah, blah. Here's this thing

I'm telling you. But when you're hearing a story that you really connect with, it connects with your heart, it may be connects with something you're going through personally.

I think that's why a lot of the best commercials work because they don't just say, Hey, buy this car. They take you on an adventure. They say, oh, this car will, you know, you're in the mountains, you're on the beach. Like all these things, like it tells that story. And I think that's also why we love we love movies like Marvel movies.

We love Lord of the rings. We love Chronicles of Narnia Harry Potter, because they're great stories with great characters who struggle and go through conflict and they experience friendship and love. And there's like good versus evil. So I think that's the power and actually the power of it, actually, I think every good story connects somehow to the gospel, whether people like realize it or not.

Like, I remember watching the Chronicles of Narnia, with a girl in Slovenia. And she had seen it before, before she was a Christian. And then when she became a Christian, she saw it with new eyes because I could explain to her like, Aslan is a parallel to Jesus and like him being sacrificed on the stone table is like how Jesus sacrificed himself for you.

And she's like, I never even put that together. And so I think. Any powerful story is going to connect somehow with gospel truth. And that's what really resonates with your heart, whether you're a believer or not like whether you realize it or not, because we are created in the image of God. So I think that's why stories powerful.

Wayne: yeah, it's really good. And we see. I mean, we both seem to be pretty big fans of Jesus and we see him talking And teaching and so much of what we have recorded. What he said is his parables, which was him using stories that connected with hearts and connected with what people saw.

You know, data is great. I love data. But man, I don't feel very emotionally attached to data very often.

Gwynne Gardner: no.

Wayne: Like it can help me know things, but that the story helps me feel things in and moves me in a different way.

Gwynne Gardner: And then we can, like, we tell those stories to other people, like the stories that we love and we resonate with, we say, oh, have you heard, or did you hear

this story about so-and-so? So then you pass it on, in a more organic way because you connected with it.

Wayne: Yeah.

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. As, as ministry leaders, as people making disciples, how can we use stories in our training, in our teaching?

Gwynne Gardner: Yeah. I think in like what you just said about how Jesus taught in parables and even how we still tell the story. Like the Bible is full of all these crazy stories. Like Noah is knowing the ark and David and Goliath and Samson and Delilah, queen Esther, like all these amazing stories. And I think when like as we're discipling young people, I think we can point them to these stories and tell them these stories and then ask, like, what is it about these stories that connects to who you are?

Like, what ha how do you see God in this story? Do you see yourself in this story? And then. I think personally, as a disciple maker, you need to be open and vulnerable about what you're going through in life. And I think of all the girls that I've discipled, it's been the best when I can say, oh, I've struggled with this and I'm inviting you in to like, pray with me as well.

And I want to hear your, your story. Have you struggled with this same thing? And so the more that we can be open. With how God is using our story, our lives with the people we're discipling. I think that's so much better, because then they feel that they too can be vulnerable.

, I just love how the Bible begins with in the beginning. Like, it sounds very much like once upon a time. And I just imagine it's this whole big story that God invites us into and it's just beautiful.

Wayne: Yeah, that's so good. I think you mentioned being able to share what we're going through, what we've walked through. I think sometimes as ministry leaders or people that are making disciples, we want to. And we want to appear like we've, you know, we need to be farther along than people were leading. So we're like, well, I kind of have it together, even though none of us really have it together, but just that power and vulnerability of, of things we've walked through, whether, whether in the past three years ago or in the past three months ago, but being able to share with people, I think, especially you know, this, this coming, this younger generation. Yeah, They they'd rather have that vulnerability than, than a pastor or a leader who seems really, really smart.

They'd rather have a person that they can connect with that they can know. Oh, you're, you're a human too. So we can walk through this together.

If someone is interested in learning more or using stories better, what are some, what are some things they can do? What would you suggest?

Gwynne Gardner: Yeah, that's, that's a great question. I think. One thing they can do is listen to podcasts like this one, like listen to people, telling their story. Also read novels, like novels are so, like filled with such great stories. Like I mentioned, like Lord of the rings and things like that, that have that hero's journey.

But also I would say just like take the time to write down your own testimony and share it, like write down, start with writing out your own story, because sometimes you might think, well, I didn't really have a story to tell, but if you actually take the time to sit down and write it out, Like, yes, you do have a story.

So believe, believe me, everyone has a story. And then I also think a great thing to do is to practice the art of asking questions because really the best stories come out when really good questions are being asked. And especially when working with young people, I've noticed that they just want someone to listen to them and they want someone to be interested in what they're interested in.

So if you have like an arsenal of some like really great questions, like what is bringing you joy right now or something that's brought you joy in the last month or. Like something like that, where it can, it's not just a yes or no question. But it really gives them a chance to think about their life.

I think that's something that we can all be better at is listening and asking better.

Wayne: That's all very good advice. And I have, I have one more question, one final question and, and you can take as long as you need to on this question, but can you share a story of, of how God is working in Central and Eastern Europe through Josiah Venture?

Gwynne Gardner: Yes. God is moving and working in lots of cool ways, but something that is happening right now in something that, so with this role of social media manager, I kind of get a more, a little glimpse until at a bigger picture of what's happening across all the countries we work in and are serving in.

And so normally around this time of year, like usually in September, we have a big equipping conference. Since we couldn't meet in person last year, we had an online event called a Youth Ministry Recharge where. Local youth leaders got together with their little, their youth, like their main youth team and watched a video that the international communications team put together.

It's all about like equipping and empowering local youth leaders. And then there was a time for discussion and things like that. And so these events happened. Across all of our countries. And so then it was so powerful last year that we decided to do it again this year also because we still couldn't be in person because pandemic.

But we did another one. So it was the youth ministry recharge volume two. And so far there have been 85 recharge events happening across all these actually 17 countries cause Bosnia was included. And almost a thousand youth leaders participated. And so the focus or the four key themes for this year were to renew your passion for youth work, reconnect with young people, rediscover disciple-making and revision your youth ministry.

So all of these youth leaders and young people got to gather and talk about it and discuss, and for me, I got to help with the social media plan that would like go out and all these countries that they would help promote this event. And we've seen such a great turnout and more people are being equipped to go out and to make disciples.

So this event mainly is for. Pretty much for already like believing Christians who are volunteering in their youth group, where they're they're youth workers. So they then get to go out and be equipped to go be disciple makers. And we've heard such great feedback. And they're excited about this material.

And so something that I get to be a part of in a small way is using social media to help promote it. But it's just been something that God's been working in. Great ways of using tools of communication and media in a more powerful way to help equip the next generation, which is like so exciting. I get pumped about it.

Wayne: absolutely. I love, I love that it's taking something that you used to do in person and instead of going. And throwing a fit because we can't do it in person figuring out what we can do in the time that we have in, and then seeing God worked through that. And instead of, instead of be like, well, we can't have a conference shucks, but, but what we can't meet altogether.

So we'll meet, spread out and be able to provide resources in and still seeing God work through that is amazing.

Gwynne Gardner: Yes.

Wayne: well, thank you Gwynne so much for your time today has been a blast to have this conversation and it is the afternoon for you. So I hope you have a good afternoon and it is six 30 in the morning for me.

So I'm going to go have some lucky terms.

Gwynne Gardner: Wonderful. Thank you so much. This was a blessing to us.

Wayne: probably not, I don't think we have lucky terms now. I'm sad.

Gwynne Gardner: You don't have any lucky charms, go drink some coffee or something.

Closing

Josh Yates: I am smiling from that podcast. That was a lot of great information from Gwynne. And particularly I'll say I love Josiah Venture and what they're doing and our ministry partnership with, with them, with our kind of our global Alliance with Concentric. But she said some great things.

In regards to just story and asking people, Hey, what is, what does that story and what is the venture of your life? And creating a connection where you can celebrate and enter into how, how Jesus is working in someone's life. And as well as the power of a story, moving from just facts and to actually what we, what we feel and moving to the, the emotion side of that, and Jesus being a master storyteller, just didn't come down and give us information, but he comes in and tells us a word picture and that we're picture a parable connects just much more of a of our emotion and yeah, it was a great, great interview, Wayne.

Thanks for setting that up.

Wayne: Yeah, it was, it was so cool to talk to Gwyn across the world. And I love the power of story. I you know, I enjoy making videos and doing those things and seeing how that works. And when she talks about how we can become better storytellers, I love the, the thought of, of reading novels.

That was something like from graduating high school for the next like 12 years. I didn't read any fiction. Cause I just, I don't enjoy reading for reading sake, but I've just enjoyed, over the last 10 years or so reading, you know, the Lord of the rings of the Narnia books and just that story and how it draws us in and how that can help us to be better when we tell our stories and we tell stories about what Christ is doing in our lives.

And I have a couple of books that I've read kind of about storytelling. And one is Jesus, the middle Eastern storyteller. And it walks through some of the parables and the language behind that and how he used those. And also one called Storify. And the subtitle for that is speaking to teenagers in a post Christian world. And it just talks about how we can use story in our communications, whether that be preaching from the stage or in small group Bible studies. But how can you story to connect with those that were discipling.

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We're on Facebook. We're on Twitter, on Instagram. Sonlife disciple-making you can find us there and here is our disciple-making moment.

Disciple Making Moment

Jay Fast: Hey, my name is Jay Fast. I have the privilege of serving as the international ministries coordinator for Sonlife and I'm here with today's disciple-making moment. One thing I want to challenge you with is, as we think about our disciples, the people that we're investing our lives in, as we think about training people and equipping people for ministry, we want to constantly have two things in mind with them.

The two things that I like to think about are the be and the do. I think Jesus always had these two pieces in mind as he was equipping his disciples as he was training people for ministry, as he was training people to be fishers of people out in the harvest field doing

the harvest work, he was thinking about the being and the doing the being piece is the, the character side.

It's the motivation. It's the heart it's. Who am I? It's my idea. Who am I as a, as a child of God, who am I as a son or a daughter of the king of Kings. It's the being it's, it's who I am. It's my character. What's going on in my mind and my motives and and my my will. But if we only focus on that, we miss out on, on one really important aspect of walking as Jesus walked.

And that's the, that's the. The doing is the walking part. It's the living as Jesus lived. It's the first John two six piece of if anyone claims to be in Christ, abide in him, he must walk as Jesus walked. And so we have to balance these two pieces, the being and the doing the being is the heart. The motive, the character, the doing is the priorities.

How am I actually living my life? Am I walking the way that Jesus walked. Am I investing my life in others. Am I working in the harvest field? And what does that look like? And so I always have to keep these two these two things in perspective, as I'm thinking about the people I'm investing in. And I want to challenge you today with a simple little tool that might help you the way it helps me keep these things in mind.

I always carry in my pocket a coin. I always carry a silver dollar everywhere I go. Just the other day I went through the. And I had to take the silver dollar out and put it in the little coin collector thing or whatever. So it didn't set off the metal detector because I always have this with me and it reminds me that there's always two sides to a coin.

Right. And that's, that's this idea in Jesus' ministry that he always had the B side of the coin, but he also always had the do side. And as he invested in his disciples, invested in their character, he was also thinking about what are they gonna do? As he was investing in their hearts and calling them to be with him, like Mark chapter three says he, he called those that he wanted and he, and he brought them close so that they could be with him, but also so that they could be sent out that he always had in mind, the being and the doing.

What about you? What does it look like in your ministry to have in mind, both the being and the doing that's the question for today?

