



BIG
TRUTHS
FOR
GROWING
MINDS

Stories of Long, Long Ago

Paul Tambrino

Big Truths for Growing Minds

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ER Every Reason
to Believe

Big Truths for Growing Minds: Stories of Long, Long Ago by Paul Tambrino
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For the Glory of God

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Once, Before Time

“Grandma, please tell us a story,” asked Caroline.

Grandma and grandpa loved to have the children visit. The children loved to hear grandma and grandpa tell them the many true stories of long, long ago.

“Alright, Caroline,” replied grandma, “once upon a time.”

“Why do all the stories begin, *once upon a time?*” asked Caroline’s little cousin Ariel.

“There is one that does not,” said grandpa.

“Please tell us that one, grandpa,” chirped

Ariel's brother Little Mark.

"Ok. Once, before time," said grandpa.

Ariel blurted out, "How long ago was *that*?"

"Before grandma was born, and that was long ago," Caroline teased and grandpa grinned.

"It was even before grandpa was born," said Ariel, "and that's a very long time ago." Grandma laughed and they all laughed.

"Once before time," grandpa continued, "there was nothing, nothing but God, that is."

"What is nothing?" asked Ariel.

"I know!" said Caroline. "Close your eyes Ariel and you will see nothing." Caroline shut her eyes real tight to show her cousin.

"That's a pretty good example, Caroline," said grandpa, "but remember there was God. And God is pure light. There is no darkness with God."

"How bright is God's light, grandma?" Ariel asked.

"Is God's light brighter than the sun, grand-

ma?” asked Little Mark.

“God’s light is brighter than ten suns,” said Caroline.

“God’s light is even brighter than that, Caroline,” said grandma. “His light is brighter than a *zillion* suns! His light is brighter than all the suns you can imagine.”

“Wow, that sure is bright,” said Ariel. “That is why I am never afraid of the dark, because I know God’s bright light is with me.”

“Those were very good comments, children,” grandpa said, “and that was an especially good deduction on your part Ariel.”

Grandpa loves to read Sherlock Holmes stories and likes to say some of the words from those stories, like “deduction” which means to make a single conclusion from a number of facts.

“Get back to the story, grandpa,” said Ariel. “You began to tell us that once, before time, there was nothing but God.”

“Does that mean there was no sun, or moon,

or stars, or even earth?” asked Little Mark, who was always asking questions.

“Yes, and Caroline there were no big scary animals either,” said grandma as she smiled at Caroline.

“I bet there were no yucky insects either,” said Ariel.

“And there were no fishes or even people, there was only God” said grandpa “and God made it all. The sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the big scary animals, the yucky insects, the fishes, and yes all of us people.”

“Wow, God must be very powerful,” said Little Mark. “He must be even stronger than our daddies, Caroline.”

“Yes,” replied grandpa, “God is even stronger than all the daddies you can imagine.”

“You can even add in the strength of all the grandpas too,” grandma winked at grandpa, “and yet God is still stronger.”

“And that is why I am never afraid, because I have God, the strongest person in the world

as my best friend,” boasted Ariel.

“Another excellent discussion and deduction,” said grandpa. They all laughed.

“But how did God know how to make everything?” asked Caroline.

“God knows everything,” replied grandma.

“God knows my name, too” said Little Mark, “and everything about me. The Bible says God knows the number of hairs that we have on our heads.”

“God knows how many grains of sand are on the beaches of all the oceans in the world and even how many stars there are in the heavens, right grandpa?” asked Ariel.

“Yes,” replied grandpa. “And God knew all about us before we were ever born. In fact, God knew all about us once, before time when there was nothing, nothing except Himself.”

“God sure is smart. My pastor said God even knows what I will be when I grow up,” said Ariel.

“God is even smarter than grandpa,” shout-

ed Caroline. Again they all laughed.

“Yes, another good discussion,” said grandma. “God is smarter than all the people that ever lived or will live. He is smarter than all the computers that were made or ever will be made, and He has shared some of His knowledge with us.”

“How did God do that?” asked Caroline.

“Well one way is through everything He created. So, as we study God’s creation we can learn more about Him,” said grandpa.

“That’s why I study hard in school too,” said Ariel, “so I can learn about everything He made and gave to us.”

“Another way God tells us about Himself in a very special way is in the Bible,” said grandma.

“And that’s why I pay attention in Sunday School too,” said Little Mark, “so I can learn special things about God.”

“Yes,” grandpa said, “God tells us about Himself in a broad way in all of His creation

and in a special way in His Holy Word, the Bible. We call the first way God's *general revelation* to us, and the second way God's *special revelation* to us."

"There goes grandpa with the big words again," teased Caroline. Again, they all laughed.

"Please continue the story grandpa - about *once before time* - about creation," Ariel pleaded.

"Okay, when God created the heaven and the earth, He first divided the light from the darkness and gave us day and night. Second, God made the heaven and the earth. Third, God made the trees, the grass, the vegetables, and the fruit. Fourth, God made the sun, and the moon, and all the stars that we see in the sky at night. Fifth, God made all the fishes in the seas and all the birds of the air. Sixth, God made dogs, and cats, and yes Caroline," grandpa winked as he grabbed her, "those big scary animals. Then God said, 'Let us make men and women in our own image,' and so He created

people. God called everything He created very good and on the seventh day He rested, to give us an example that on every seventh day we too should rest in Him.”

“Where is God?” asked Caroline.

“He is everywhere,” replied Ariel.

“Yes,” said grandpa, “since God created everything, once, before time, He is in and with everything and in and with everyplace He created.”

“That is why I never feel lonely,” said Ariel, “because I know God is always with me.”

“Yes, Ariel, that’s an excellent conclusion,” praised grandma.

“That’s right,” said grandpa, “another brilliant deduction by our grandchildren!” Again, they all laughed.

“Let’s not forget about God’s great love for us. The reason He made everything once before time was because He loved us. God created us so we could also try to love Him,” said grandma.

“Why did you say we could try to love God?” asked Ariel. “I do love God.”

“So do I love God,” shouted Caroline, Ariel and Little Mark together.

“I know you do dears,” said grandma, “and so do your mommy and daddy. And grandpa and I love God. But God’s love is so great that He loves us every second of the day and night. He is constantly caring for us, even when we are asleep because God never sleeps. God always has us on His mind. When I say we try to love God, I mean there are sadly many times throughout the day and night when we don’t even think about Him.”

“We should love God with all our heart and mind and strength, right grandpa?” asked Ariel.

“Yes,” replied grandpa, “and what grandma is saying is that we don’t always do that, but we sure can try.”

“And now children it is time for bed. Let’s say our prayers.”

“Let me start,” said Caroline. “Dear God, thank you for being there once, before time.”

“Thank you God for being so strong that you made everything, once, before time,” added Ariel.

“Thank you God for knowing how to make it all, once, before time,” added Little Mark.

“And thank you God, for knowing all about me, once, before time,” said Caroline.

“Thank you God for telling us some things about Yourself, and for never leaving us alone,” prayed Little Mark.

“And thank you God, for loving us so much, once, before time that you picked out the perfect mommies and daddies and grandmas and grandpas for each of us. Amen,” said Ariel.

“Good night God,” added Caroline. “Thank you for staying awake all night to keep us safe.”

“Yes,” Ariel said, “God thank you for staying awake since, once, before time to keep all of us safe.”

“Another brilliant deduction by all of you,”

Once, Before Time

said grandpa.

“Good night children,” said grandma as she gently kissed each child. And in her heart, grandma prayed, “Thank you God for giving me all of this, *once, before time.*”

Nothing Can Not Do Something

“Time for breakfast!” called grandma. Caroline, Ariel, and Little Mark ran to beat grandpa to the kitchen. Christmas dinner plates were neatly arranged in front of five chairs. A glass of orange juice had been placed off to the right of each dinner plate. In the center of the table a sixth Christmas plate was heaped high with pancakes. Off to the side was another plate of scrambled eggs and strips of bacon.

Ariel reminded everyone that it was her turn to ask the blessing for the breakfast meal. “Dear God,” she prayed. “Thank you for

keeping us safe and warm through the night. Thank you for this new day and for this breakfast food. Amen.”

After Ariel had poured some maple syrup over the two buttered pancakes she had placed on her plate, she asked, “Who made God?”

“Don’t be silly,” said Caroline, “God made Himself, right grandpa?”

“Well, not really, Caroline,” replied grandpa. “God always was. Nobody made Him.”

“But,” Caroline said, “doesn’t everything made have to have a maker.”

“Yes,” grandma said, “but every maker does not itself have to have a maker?”

Grandpa added, “Yes every effect has to have a cause, but every cause does not have to have a cause.”

“I’m confused,” said Little Mark.

“Me too,” said Caroline as she put her right hand on her forehead. “In fact I’m getting an Excedrin headache.”

“You see,” said grandpa, “if everything had a

beginning, there would have to be a time when nothing existed.”

“I get it!” shouted Ariel. “If there was a time that nothing existed, then nothing would exist now. Something has to come from something, something can not come from nothing.”

“Ex nihilo, nihil fit,” said grandma.

“Huh,” giggled Ariel. “Grandma you sure are talking funny.”

“Grandma is remembering her Latin,” said grandpa. “What she said in Latin means, out of nothing, nothing comes.”

“I understand now, too,” said Caroline. “Nothing can’t produce a something. So for anything to exist there had to be something that had no beginning. And that something has to be God.”

“And God could not have made Himself, because He would have had to not exist and yet exist at the same time to make Himself. That is impossible!” shouted Ariel.

“So God is different from everything else

because He had no beginning. That's why the Bible starts out with 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,'" said Little Mark.

"Yes, nothing can not do something and nothing will clean up the breakfast dishes. So whose turn is it to help this morning?" asked grandma.

"I guess it's my turn to help you grandma," said Caroline, as Ariel and Little Mark ran out of the kitchen with grandpa.

"You won't miss out on anything Caroline," teased Ariel. "We won't do something without you unless there is nothing to do. And since there cannot be nothing, we'll be doing something."

Why Is There Some Coal in My Christmas Stocking?

Uncle Mark was driving the van very slowly as the snow was falling very hard. Each home they passed looked more beautiful than the last one. Bright colored lights of red, green, blue and yellow were everywhere. Decorated trees, bushes, doors and windows appeared to have a twin as they reflected off the newly fallen snow that had completely turned the ground into a mantle of white. It was Christmas Eve.

The Easterbrook's and the Tambrino's were returning from the children's Christmas program at the church. Ariel had played Mary for

the first time in her life. Little Mark was a wise man and Caroline read the Christmas story from a children's Bible. Grandma and grandpa along with Ariel's and Caroline's parents had returned to Iowa for Christmas this year to visit their extended family.

After pulling the van into the Bed and Breakfast place they were renting for the week, the children ran and hid in the bushes waiting for their grandparents to get out of the car. As grandma and grandpa were walking toward the house the children peppered them with soft snowballs. Grandpa groaned, as he hated snow. He reached down and tossed a handful of snow back at them as grandma retreated into the house to get out of the line of fire.

Tonight was the night everyone got to open his or her Christmas presents. In less than an hour the room looked a tornado had hit. The neatly wrapped packages were now scattered about with ribbons and wrapping paper everywhere. To make matters worse their dog

Holmes was running off into other rooms with every piece of ribbon he could find.

“I’m hungry,” said grandpa who always looked forward to the annual Christmas Eve spread.

They gathered around the dining room table stacked high with all kinds of cold cuts, breads, Christmas cookies and cakes. In the center was a large bowl of eggnog.

Soon they began talking about Christmas day. The children suddenly remembered they had to hang up their stockings. It was traditional that the children’s stockings were somehow filled “miraculously” before Christmas morning.

“Will there be some coal in my stocking again this year?” asked Little Mark.

“Of course there will,” said Ariel.

“But why?” asked Little Mark.

“I can’t remember, but there is a good reason,” recalled Ariel.

“I remember why,” said Caroline. “It re-

minds us that we are not perfect. We are not always good.”

“But why?” Little Mark asked again.

“You are getting just like your sister Ariel with all your questions. Let’s ask grandma and grandpa,” said Caroline.

“Remember that story about *once, before time?*” asked grandma. “Well when God created men and women He demanded strict obedience to Him. God gave humans freedom over everything provided they obeyed Him. God said they could not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then what happened?”

“I know,” said Ariel. “Adam and Eve, who were the first people created by God, disobeyed and ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

“But, I didn’t eat that fruit,” said Little Mark.

“Yes, we all did,” said grandma.

“Adam and Eve were our true representatives. They acted on our behalf,” said grandpa.

“Like our representatives in Washington D. C., right grandpa?” asked Caroline.

Before grandpa could respond, Ariel said, “That can’t be Caroline. We elect our Washington representatives and we never elected Adam and Eve. I sure would not have voted for them!”

Grandpa responded. “We may not think so, but Adam and Eve were our ideal representatives. Although we did not elect them, God, who knows us best, elected them as our perfect representatives. Remember, we were all in the mind of God at the foundation of the world. So He who knows us best, elected the ones who would best represent us, Adam and Eve.”

“But,” interrupted grandma, “while the coal in our stockings may remind us that we are all sinners and our behaviors fall short of what God would have us do, remember that our stockings are more full of wonderful gifts than they are of coal. And that reminds us...”

Why Is There Some Coal in My Christmas Stocking?

“I know, I know,” chirped Caroline, “it reminds us of the greatest gift of all that God gave to us this day. It reminds us that God’s Son Jesus came into the world to overcome sin, just as the other presents in our stockings have overcome the coal.”

“That’s right Caroline,” said grandma, “now let’s hang up those stockings and go to bed. Then we can say our prayers being especially thankful to God for sending us Jesus to take upon Himself the ‘coal’ in our lives.” To which Ariel shouted a loud, “AMEN!”



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ONCE...BEFORE TIME

In this wonderful collection of children's stories by author and professor Paul Tambrino (*Ask Augustine*, and *Mariology: Past, Present and Future*) three precocious youngsters; Caroline, Ariel, and Little Mark, spend the holiday season with their grandma and grandpa who help acquaint them with various nuggets of wisdom from God's Word, including lessons about God's all-knowing and ever-present nature, His general and special revelation, His creation and more.

Christmas warmth, tender humor and family affection complement the rich theological insights of this precious volume. Each story is guaranteed to enrich the spiritual understandings of readers young and young at heart.

Paul Tambrino, Ed.D., Ph.D. is President Emeritus of the Iowa Valley Community College District, and former Academic Vice President of Warren County Community College. Prior to becoming an academic administrator he taught accounting and more recently theology at several colleges and seminaries, served in the U.S. Army Reserve, writes a weekly newspaper column, and has written several journal articles and the books, *Ask Augustine* and *Mariology: Past, Present and Future*. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Theology from Trinity Seminary, and a Doctor of Education from Temple University. Paul was awarded the honorary rank of a three star general at the US Air War College, Air War University-class of 1997 and he is a Paul Harris Fellow in Rotary International. Today, he enjoys spending time with his family, rooting for the Yankees and spreading God's word.



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