



WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT

CRAFTING ENGAGING PLOTS

What the Bible Teaches about Engaging Plots

God is the Master Storyteller.

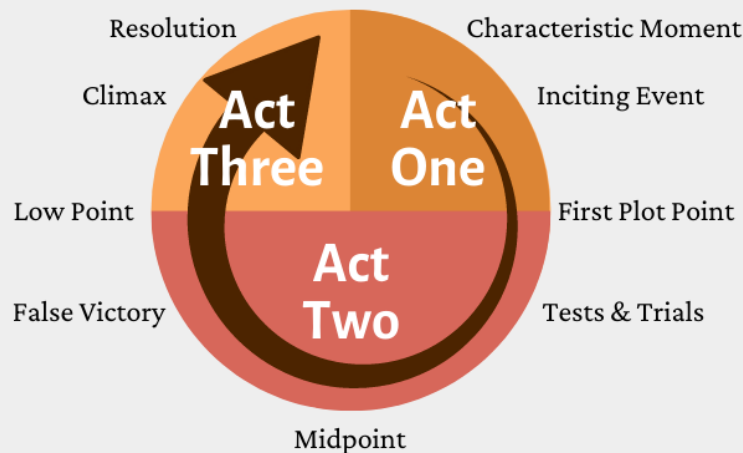
And the story that runs from Creation to Fall to Cross to Resurrection is the most powerful story of all time.

So why don't we spend more time as Christian storytellers considering what the Bible teaches us about plot?

While we may not think about plot structures and the Bible in the same thought, the model of Scripture actually provides fantastic insights about effective plot structure. While it is a complex literary work with a number of "side stories," its central narrative shares many similarities with traditional Three Act plot structure.

This resource aims to walk you through nine key plot moments in a story and explain how the example of Scripture can help us write these scenes more effectively.

Plot Structure at a Glance:



Two Quick Notes:

There are multiple types of character arcs, which can affect plots in different ways. Because the Grand Redemption Narrative is a positive arc, however, our applications will focus on that arc.

Because history doesn't always fit clean categories, some events occur closer together than they would in a novel. Don't try to match the pacing of your novel to the pacing of our historical examples. But you should find plenty to glean from *how* each point is portrayed.

The Characteristic Moment

(Story Location: somewhere around the 0-5% mark)

What the Characteristic Moment Is

This is going to be one of the first scenes (if not *the* first scene) of your book where you introduce readers to your protagonist. Good authors use this scene to reveal the essence of the protagonist and paint a vivid first impression in their reader's mind.

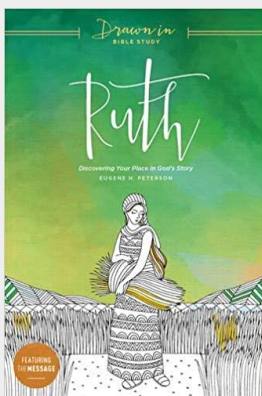
Where It Is in the Grand Redemption Narrative

In the Bible, the characteristic moment is **The Garden of Eden**. We are given a clear picture of what our “protagonist” (human beings in God’s covenant community) is like and what kind of life we were meant to live, giving us a strong desire to regain that blessed existence.

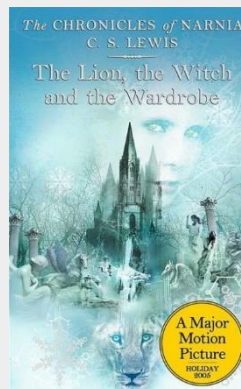
What the Scriptures Teach Us about the Characteristic Moment

Your characteristic moment needs to show us what characters will be striving to achieve and why this is so important. Because most stories begin in a fallen world, they shouldn't normally have status quos as idyllic as Eden's. However, just like Eden, try to craft a scene that instills in the characters (and readers) a clear, deep longing for what they want to gain.

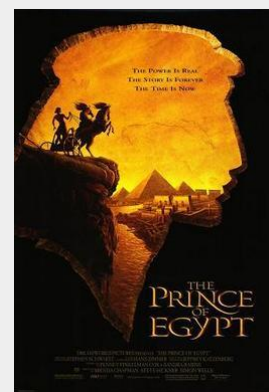
What This Looks Like in Other Christian Stories



Ruth and her sister are married, foreshadowing what Ruth will look for.



Lucy enters Narnia and learns how beautiful and dangerous it is.



We see the children of Israel suffering and pleading for deliverance.

The Inciting Event

(Story Location: somewhere around the 5-15% mark)

What the Inciting Event Is

This is the moment where the protagonist is forced to begin to interact with the story's main plot. The protagonist won't commit herself to achieving the plot goal yet, but she is going to consider it. It's the traditional "Call to Adventure" that shifts the status quo and leads into the first plot point.

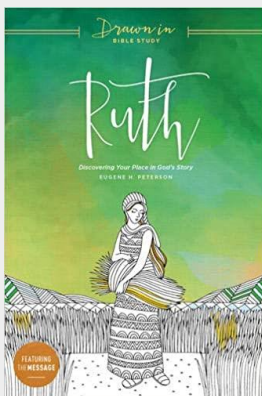
Where It Is in the Grand Redemption Narrative

In the Bible, the great inciting event is **The Fall** of Adam and Eve where the villain (Satan) successfully tempts our protagonists. They are now fully cognizant of their nakedness and shame and understand their need for salvation.

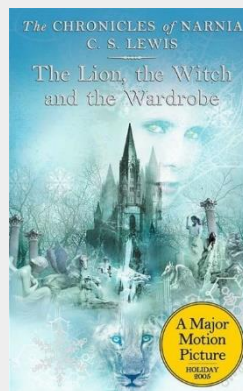
What the Scriptures Teach Us about the Inciting Event

Just like the Fall clearly showed us the consequences of sin and the need for change, your Inciting Event needs to poignantly remind us why the status quo is flawed. You shouldn't *just* write the Inciting Event as a call to adventure. You should *also* use it to vividly highlight the larger brokenness of the world that the protagonist is going to be seeking to change.

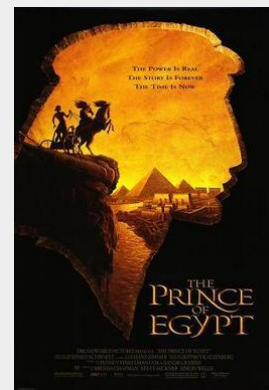
What This Looks Like in Other Christian Stories



The husbands die and Naomi and her daughters are left by themselves.



Edmund meets the White Witch and agrees to help her.



Moses is made regent, but begins to realize how the Israelites are oppressed.

The First Plot Point

(Story Location: somewhere around the 20-25% mark)

What the First Plot Point Is

This point marks the transition from the First Act to the Second Act of your story. At this plot point, your protagonist is forced to *commit* herself to her plot goal. The inciting event began her involvement, but here she commits because she realizes just how important her choices are.

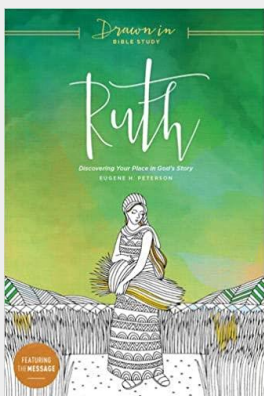
Where It Is in the Grand Redemption Narrative

In the Bible, the first plot point is **The Covenants** God makes with human beings. Because human beings can't save themselves, the primary commitment is made by God, not us. But these covenants do carry responsibilities for human beings as well.

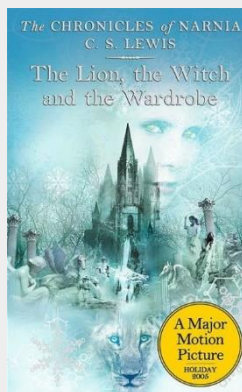
What the Scriptures Teach Us about the First Plot Point

This scene isn't just a commitment; you also need to make a promise to your readers about what to expect, just like God did with the covenants. Is this a romance or a war story? Will the story end in a courtroom or haunted mansion? Your story shouldn't be predictable (just like the Israelites didn't realize what Christ would be like), but the first plot point should foreshadow what's to come.

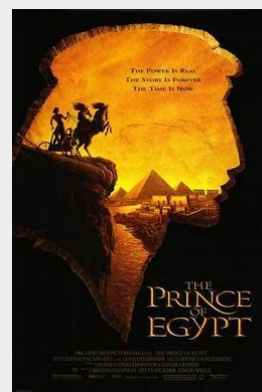
What This Looks Like in Other Christian Stories



Ruth leaves Moab with Naomi and claims God's promises for herself.



The Pevensies enter Narnia and decide to rescue Mr. Tumnus from the Witch.



Moses learns about the murder of children and runs from Pharaoh.

Tests & Obstacles

(Story Location: between the 30- 50% mark)

What the Tests & Obstacles Are

The Second Act is all about throwing a variety of tests and trials at the protagonist. They develop the humanity of your protagonist as she tries (often without much success) to deal with the core problems she faces in the story.

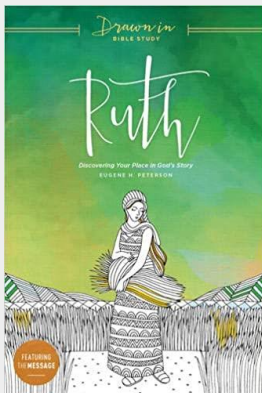
Where It Is in the Grand Redemption Narrative

In the Bible, the tests and obstacles can be seen in **the Old Testament** as the Israelites try (and fail) to live up to God's standards. No matter how they try to do so (with the Law, judges, kings, and prophets), they still can't find an answer to the power of the Devil and corruption of sin.

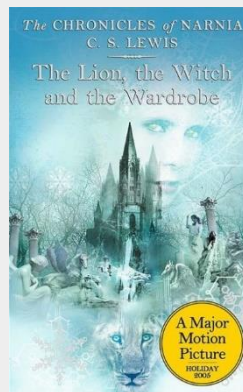
What the Scriptures Teach Us about Tests & Obstacles

While the protagonist ought to be trying to succeed in this section, make sure that her wrong Experiment in Living hinders her from doing so. Her character flaw needs to be so significant that she won't be able to make progress until the upcoming Midpoint where she's forced to look at herself and the lies she believes square in the face.

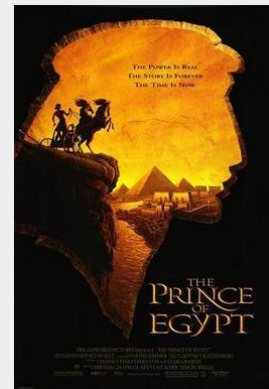
What This Looks Like in Other Christian Stories



Ruth begins gleaning at the field and wins the favor of Boaz.



The Pevensies find the Beavers; Edmund slips away to find the White Witch.



Moses fails to help the Israelites by himself and runs off to Midian.

The Midpoint

(Story Location: somewhere around the 50% mark)

What the Midpoint Is

This is one of the most important scenes in your novel. Before, your protagonist was *reacting* to the villain and his plans. At the midpoint, she has a key character revelation that both changes her *and* her approach to the plot. After this point, she will be more active than reactive.

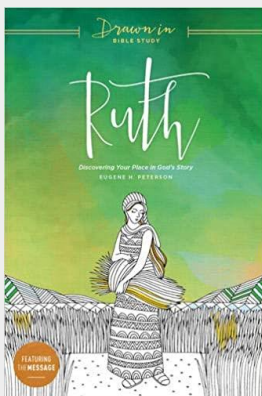
Where It Is in the Grand Redemption Narrative

In the Bible, the great midpoint is the **Incarnation** of Christ that divides the Old Testament from the New Testament. Because we can't save ourselves, the Israelites don't have a key character revelation here. But their expectations for salvation do change when Christ enters the narrative.

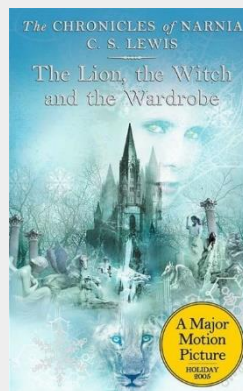
What the Scriptures Teach Us about the Midpoint

We should write midpoints featuring some revelation that's surprising yet also foreshadowed—just like the Incarnation was! You should also include some element of grace here—the protagonist's epiphany and change should either be influenced by someone else in the story, or the protagonist should be reaching out to someone else. As the Incarnation reminds us, we can't save ourselves.

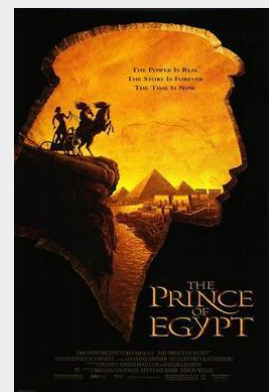
What This Looks Like in Other Christian Stories



Naomi convinces Ruth to step things up by asking Boaz to marry her.



The Beavers reveal Edmund's betrayal, and they flee toward Aslan's camp.



God confronts Moses in the Burning Bush and tasks him with delivering his people.

The False Victory

(Story Location: somewhere around the 70-75% mark)

What the False Victory Is

As the story progresses from the midpoint toward the end of the second act, events should begin to seem to be going the protagonist's way. She's making headway with her new Experiment in Living, and the path to victory should seem clear and readily accomplished for a brief moment in time.

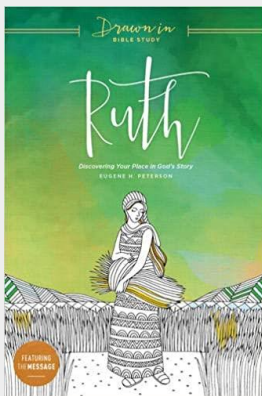
Where It Is in the Grand Redemption Narrative

In the Bible, the false victory can be seen in **the Triumphal Entry**. Christ's ministry has been gathering larger and larger crowds and as he enters into Jerusalem on a donkey, the Israelites & disciples are likely wondering if this is all a prelude to his coronation.

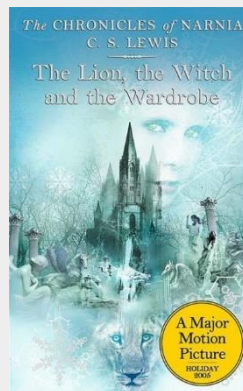
What the Scriptures Teach Us about the False Victory

Just like the Triumphal Entry set up false expectations for the disciples, you should often make sure your protagonist's plans seem like they're beginning to succeed by the end of the Second Act in order to set the protagonist (and readers) up for the incoming catastrophe. Make sure that the false hopes stem from the protagonist still not completely living out her new epiphany as deeply or consistently as she could be.

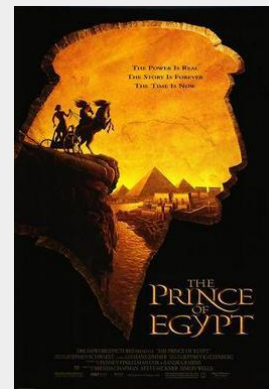
What This Looks Like in Other Christian Stories



Ruth has successfully won Boaz's heart and he reciprocates interest.



The Pevensies join Aslan and successfully rescue Edmund from the Witch.



The plagues strike Egypt and begin to topple the might of their kingdom.

The Low Point

(Story Location: somewhere around the 75-80% mark)

What the Low Point Is

This will be the darkest moment in your story because your villain or antagonistic force needs to *appear* to have won. The protagonist will lose terribly and doubt if she can succeed in her story goals. This forces her to re-commit to her goal one last time.

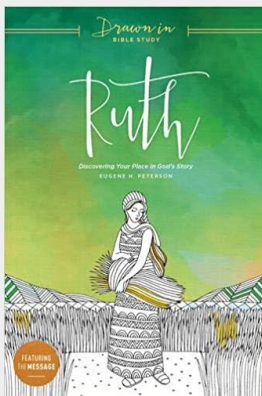
Where It Is in the Grand Redemption Narrative

In the Bible, the great low point is **Gethsemane**. Christ sweats drops of blood as he fears the upcoming trial of the cross, and all his disciples abandon him shortly after. The disciples believe all is lost at this point. Have the Devil's plans succeeded?

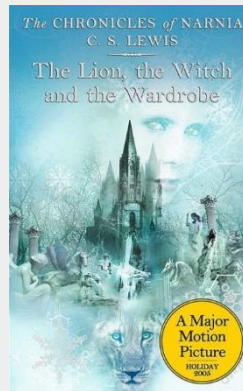
What the Scriptures Teach Us about the Low Point

You can't write this moment as an external defeat alone. It should also be a psychological defeat. Think about what the equivalent of "sweating drops of blood" might look like in your story. And consider what it might look like for your protagonist to feel alone just like Christ felt alone at this point in the narrative.

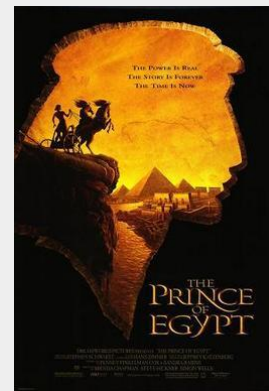
What This Looks Like in Other Christian Stories



Ruth learns that someone else holds the legal rights to marry her first.



Aslan gives himself over to the White Witch to be killed.



Ramses decides to kill the Israelites and in response the Angel of Death is sent.

The Climax

(Story Location: somewhere around the 90-95% mark)

What the Climax Is

This is the moment where your protagonist finally obtains or fails to obtain the goal she's been trying to achieve the whole story. This is the biggest, most captivating part of your story, because this is where good authors make a killer last impression.

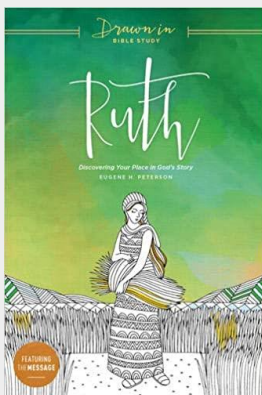
Where It Is in the Grand Redemption Narrative

In the Bible, the great climax is of course the **Cross and Resurrection**. Unlike most stories, the protagonist isn't responsible for the victory. Instead, Christ makes the ultimate sacrifice in order to redeem his people and subsequently conquer the Devil in his triumphal rise from the grave.

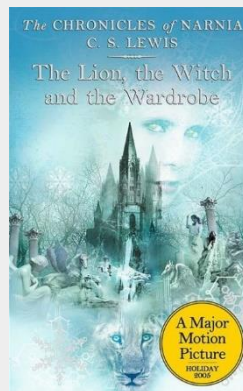
What the Scriptures Teach Us about the Climax

The greatest victories only come through the greatest sacrifices, so your protagonist should have to sacrifice something in order to win (though it may be something she gets back). You should also include an element of grace—the protagonist needs human or divine help in order to succeed just like none of us can succeed without God's grace to us through Christ.

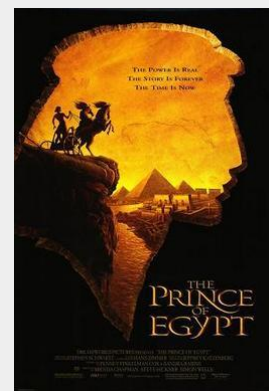
What This Looks Like in Other Christian Stories



Ruth risks being married to Elimelech, but Boaz wins the right to marry her.



Aslan is killed, but rises up from the Stone Table and defeats the White Witch.



Moses escapes Ramses through the Red Sea and finally gives up his brother.

The Resolution

(Story Location: the 98-100% mark)

What the Resolution Is

Your protagonist has achieved her story goal. Now, she's presented with her reward for succeeding. How is life going to be better now that she has won? The resolution shows us how the actions of the book have made her a better person and brought her to a better place.

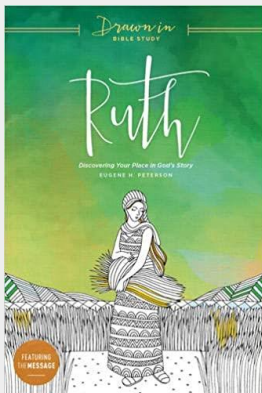
Where It Is in the Grand Redemption Narrative

In the Bible, the great resolution is found in Revelation with the consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven. We see a full restoration of the New Eden as the final victory has been achieved and the Church is finally welcomed back into paradise.

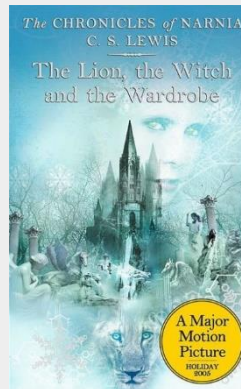
What the Scriptures Teach Us about the Resolution

Look to find ways to mirror the beginning where we see a realization of the protagonist's earliest hopes. Because stories still end in a fallen world, the resolution won't be perfect and there may be a sense of the bittersweet. But you still want to give readers time to enjoy the new reality and imagine the protagonist's future adventures. In the words of *The Last Battle*, "Further Up and Further In!"

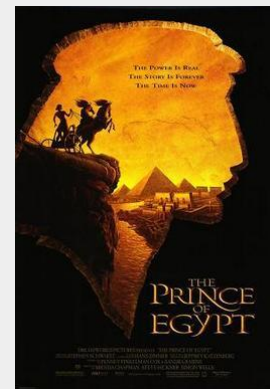
What This Looks Like in Other Christian Stories



Ruth is married to Boaz and has several children with him.



The Pevensies are crowned kings and queens of Narnia.



The children of Israel are finally free, and they rejoice in their deliverance.

You know how the Bible models effective plot structure.

But are you confident about your ability to pull this off yourself?

INTRODUCING THE ENGAGING PLOTS SUMMIT

Let us teach you how to master these techniques.



Learn More at StoryEmbers.org/Engaging-Plots-Summit/