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Coming to a Good End

Recently someone sent us a book we've thoroughly enjoyed. It's entitled "Great Endings: Closing Lines of Great Novels," by Georgianne Ensign. In it, the author makes three very interesting observations about great works of fiction. First, she notes that the ending of the work is where all the loose ends must be tied up successfully. Secondly, she claims that while the author is free to do with the characters whatever he or she wishes, still, the characters' personalities and nature must be considered and honored by the author as the closing of the story is crafted. Finally, the most brilliant works of fiction often end by returning the reader to the story's beginning, but this time wiser, more satisfied, and with greater hope, for having read the story about these characters.

It has struck us that as we live our lives, they have the potential to take on the quality of a good story with a great ending. If you were to do a quick self-assessment, how would your life story fare? Is it becoming a really good story, headed for a great ending? Well, let's try applying the standards of a great work of fiction to our life stories.

First, if great stories end with all the loose ends successfully tied, then perhaps we should be considering how effective we are in finishing unfinished business, and in straightening out the messes we have encountered or made. From our homes and families, to our careers and our commitments, are we completing what we've begun? Are we going to be able to say that because of us, life is fairer, or neater, or clearer, or truer? We need to tie up our loose ends.

Secondly, if great stories teach us something through their characters' natures and their choices, what could be gleaned in "reading" our lives? We might want to consider whether or not we have stayed true to character through all the events of our lives. We might ask ourselves if there are themes that recur for us, or tendencies we never shed, or responses we always make. Perhaps these indelible features will be the prominent themes of our life's story. Are we satisfied with that?

And, if great stories offer the reader wisdom, satisfaction, or hope, can we claim such an outcome for the "readers" of our lives? Will those who observe our lives find a lesson in them? Do our lives teach the value of curiosity? The joy of discovery? The power of a dream? The stability of faith?

We are the characters of ongoing tales that can be filled with joy and good humor, or unredeemable tragedy. The story of our lives can be uplifting and inspiring, or uninteresting and routine. Our lives can end brilliantly, or they can close with quiet obscurity. What makes for the difference?

You may have your answer to this. But here is our response. A great life story is one which has determined its course by considering how God, its ultimate "Author," would want the story to flow and to end. So, how is your life story shaping up?