

Trusting author of our life stories

After a full day of throwing and catching and jumping and climbing, our children are finally tucked into bed. It's time for bedtime stories.

Tonight I want to introduce them to one of my favorites. It's a chapter book, a fantasy book by the children's author Eva Ibbotson. There aren't many pictures, but I've always found her characters delightful, her plots dynamic. I am excited to invite my sons to join me on this splendid imaginary journey.

I sit down, open the book, and launch into the opening. I don't get far, however, before the questions begin.

"Mama, what is this story?"

I stop and read the description on the book flap, trying to make it sound fascinating and dramatic - and maybe even a little scary. They seem unimpressed.

"Let's see what happens!" I say. But I can't get beyond the first few pages. The questions just keep coming.

"What's an ogre?" "Is this a good guy or a bad guy?" "Why aren't there more pictures?" "When is it going to get interesting?"

"Wait and see," I say. "This is just the beginning. We have to keep reading to get to the good parts."

So I keep trying, but our boys have lost interest. One wants a drink of water, and the other is sliding a Donald Duck comic book onto my lap. I can't capture their attention. I finally tell them we'll read to the end of the chapter and decide whether to continue.

Of course, I could insist that we read the whole story, but I don't want our children to think reading is like eating your vegetables or brushing your teeth. I want them to read books they enjoy.

By the end of the chapter, it's clear that we are giving up on this marvelous read.

This story, at least for now, is over.

I want to believe that if we had read another chapter, the book would have won over my audience. But my sons didn't want to wait through the pages that set the scene. They wanted to catch a glimpse into the adventure right away and get caught up in the story.

As I put the book back on the shelf, I think about how children often want immediate satisfaction. They aren't open to this book, even though I tell them they'll love it. If they don't like the story right away, they cast it aside. Then I stop and think. Isn't that how I sometimes am with God?

I want him to make each new chapter in life seem easy and interesting. I want him to answer all the questions from the beginning, provide pictures along the way - and maybe even a map - and tailor it to my interests, my hopes, my abilities. I want him to assure me that each new experience will go smoothly, that there won't be any unexpected twists, that it will be clear who the good guys are, that the path will be straight and sure.

But that's not how life works. And often in my journey, I'm not much different from a child who would prefer a Donald Duck comic book over a long chapter book without pictures.

Recently as I was making a difficult decision, I kept thinking I needed clarity. After weeks of deliberations, it occurred to me that God was answering my questions. I was just struggling with the answers, so I kept asking in different ways. It wasn't clarity that I needed. It was acceptance. I needed to realize the story wasn't the one I wanted to read, the one I wanted to be part of myself. Once I saw that, I was still disappointed, but I was able to step forward in faith.

"Our concern must be to know God's will," St. Gianna Molla is quoted as saying. "We must enter the path if God wants, when God wants, how

God wants."

We have to accept that even with the suffering and challenges life can bring, God is writing a more wonderful story than we could imagine. And he walks beside us

through each and every page.