“*The Gospel According to Broadway* isn’t quite an evangelistic treatise using various Broadway shows to explicate the gospel, unless one understands that the root word *euangelion* literally means “good news.” Indeed, the book is full of good news, the good news of God’s love for humanity and desire to be in relationship with us, despite all our foibles. Carter lays sacred texts from every biblical genre—books of law, history, poetry, wisdom literature, prophetic literature, the Gospels, and letters—alongside well-known Broadway productions in order for each to inform the other. Preachers looking for good sermon material will find Carter’s book a useful resource, and others—without any agenda—will find it simply a good read.”

—Robin Sandbothe, Pastor, Bethel Church, Columbia, Missouri
Associate, Pinnacle Leadership Associates; Coach

“Terrell Carter is one of the most creative people I know—pastor, theologian, educator, artist, social entrepreneur. He now brings his creative lens to *The Gospel According to Broadway*. This volume not only provides rich theological and biblical insights, but also encourages us to engage our culture as a means of communicating the gospel. Carter draws on Broadway shows (some more familiar than others) to share biblical truths that lead to a pointed application—sometimes with a bit of a twist. The reader will find the book both entertaining and inspirational.”

—Ircel Harrison, Supplemental Professor of Missional Theology
Central Seminary, Shawnee, Kansas

“Terrell Carter’s delightful book will send you back to the Bible for more reading and back to the theater (or TV screen) for more shows. Perfect for individuals or small group sessions, he takes familiar modern tales to help us reconsider the old stories that should guide our lives. Not only will you enjoy this book, but I doubt you’ll make it through without humming some classic showtunes.”

—Brian Kaylor, President and Editor-in-Chief, *Word & Way*
“Terrell Carter masterfully broadens the reader’s understanding of what the full gospel of Christ entails. By creatively connecting the plots of various Broadway musicals to the greater story of God’s movement, the reader begins to imagine a deeper life of resurrection. While reading The Gospel According to Broadway, I find myself at the intersection of 42nd Street and God’s great story—and that is a truly sacred place.”

—David McDaniel, Senior Pastor, Holmeswood Baptist Church, Kansas City, Missouri

“People of faith can become so enmeshed in their scriptures that they forget they are reading a story with plot, characters, setting, and conflict. Sometimes the antidote to that amnesia is to set our holy texts alongside other stories to tease out the common elements. That is exactly what Terrell Carter has done here. He masterfully directs a production of the Bible’s generative narrative alongside beloved tales of the stage. His words also illumine how our own stories intersect with God’s grand story. Bravo, Terrell! Take a bow!”

—Tyler Tankersley, Senior Pastor, Ardmore Baptist Church Winston-Salem, North Carolina

“Carter unpacks profound theological and biblical concepts, artistically connecting them with major themes from Broadway’s greatest productions. Whether for personal reflection, biblical scholarship, or pastoral leadership, Carter offers an engaging and coherent work of art in The Gospel According to Broadway.”

—Adam B. Banks, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Springfield, Ohio
THE GOSPEL

According to

BROADWAY

Terrell Carter
DEDICATION

To Rev. Dr. Warren Hoffman:
I learned more about preaching, creativity, and pastoral care in the few years I served under your leadership than I can ever repay. Thank you for taking me under your wing and for being a friend.

To the community at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kansas:
Thank you for helping me reevaluate my theology and beliefs about God’s kingdom and who can participate in it.

To the members of Webster Groves Baptist Church:
Thank you for being patient with me as I continue to become the leader you need and want.

To Genevieve and Jerry Carter:
Thank you for life more abundant.
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The Gospel Revisited
Depending on who you ask, a good story contains between five and ten components that help readers understand what is happening, why they should care about the characters, and how the story will ultimately end. For this book, I have decided that five components are enough, and I have chosen to discuss the characters, setting, plot, conflict, and resolution only enough so as not to bore you! When combined creatively, the connections between these five components can keep the story running smoothly and allow readers to stay engaged to the end.

1. Characters: The individuals taking part in the action
2. Setting: The place or places where the action occurs
3. Plot: The main events of the story
4. Conflict: The struggle between characters that provides tension
5. Resolution: The solution to the conflict

The Bible tells God’s story—the primary character is God, the Creator of all things.

The setting is primarily Earth because God’s home is holy and unseeable and, as the writers of the Bible said, God is spirit and exists outside of everything that God created. To bridge the gap between God’s invisibility and humankind’s physicality, God created places such as the Garden of Eden, the Tabernacle, and Solomon’s Temple as points where the holy and human could overlap.
The main plot of the story is that God values relationships. It seems as though God created all things—especially humankind—to be in relationship. All relationships are important: relationships between the holy and human; relationships between the human and human; and relationships between humans and the rest of created order. God created a world for humankind to live in and spaces within that world where God could interact with humans. God also created the world as a place for humankind to live among each other. God outlined God’s expectations for what it means for humans to be in relationship with their Creator and with each other; indeed, humans are to recognize God’s majesty and authority and to recognize and affirm the love and care that God wants for all people and creation. By setting these parameters, God helps humans understand that they can trust the One who created them, and that trust should influence not only their relationship with God but also with each other.

The conflict in the story is that humans disregarded the parameters God set for relationships. Instead of trusting that God loved them and had their best interests at heart, humankind doubted God and went against God’s request. We learn that the first rebellion occurred in the Garden of Eden when humankind, instead of being thankful for what God had already provided for them and being satisfied with the work God had designated them to do, went after the one thing God told them was off limits. After this, God’s relationship with humans changed. The Bible describes this mistrust and what came about from it as sin. God’s holy character could not stand sin (the distrust that humans exhibited) and eventually removed humans from the space where the holy and human could reside together in uninterrupted relationship. Instead of living in perfection, humankind and all creation struggled.

After this first act of rebellion, God removed humankind from the Garden of Eden; humankind then rebelled in their relationships with each other. Instead of understanding that God had created the world for everyone, humankind began wanting what others had. More relationships were destroyed, more lives were damaged, and God’s heart was further broken.
Since humankind’s descent into sin, resolution has been hard to come by. What we learn in the early chapters of the Bible is that humankind continues to focus on gaining material wealth and controlling others instead of being in relationship with God and each other according to God’s desires.

The Bible affirms humanity’s unwillingness and inability to appreciate the opportunities God provided them. Yet, despite humanity’s failures, God never gives up hope or turns away from the desire of people to restore relationships. God’s faithfulness serves as the foundation of the “good news” that is the gospel.
The Greek word for “gospel” is euangelion, which means “good news.” At its core, the gospel is the good news of God’s love. Although we primarily understand and interact with the word gospel as it relates to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, it actually originated with the good news found in the early pages of the Hebrew Bible that, in spite of humankind’s rebellion, God would not only remain in relationship with humanity but would also go even further by personally repairing the relationship between God and humankind. This endless love expressed by God toward humanity and all of creation is the essence of the gospel.

In Hebrews 10:4-10, the writer explores the intent and history of the process of how, in the beginning, God provided humankind with the means to participate in restored relationship with the Creator (by receiving forgiveness and being restored from sin) through a system of conciliatory sacrifices and how later Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection, fulfilled God’s intentions for an uninterrupted relationship with humankind.

Hebrews is a study in the contrasts of faithfulness, in particular God’s faithfulness to be in relationship with humankind in contrast to humankind’s inconsistent participation in that faithful relationship. We learn in Hebrews that God has always been consistent in actions and attitudes toward humankind. That consistency began in the Garden of Eden and continued through the covenant God made to Abraham to bless him with a family that would eventually bless the entire world.
God’s covenant was reaffirmed to descendants of Abraham, including Jacob (later known as Israel), Moses, David, Solomon, and other prophets whom God used to remind humankind of God’s promises to love, cherish, and be in relationship with them, no matter how far they strayed from their Creator. This inconsistent participation in relationship with God, whether by those leaders or by the people they led, was why a symbolic, sacrificial system was created early on in the Bible.

This sacrificial system was practiced on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly calendar, but it could not fully accomplish what God wanted for humankind: the full and complete transformation of humankind and restoration of relationships. Despite being God-ordained, the main thing the sacrificial system accomplished was to remind people of their sin (mistrust toward God).

People regularly participated in the processes of the sacrificial system because they regularly sinned against God and each other, but participation in the system was not conducive to feelings of joy: they felt pain and embarrassment for not being or doing as God wanted. This pain and embarrassment, however, did not always deter people from doing things that damaged their relationships with God and each other.

In response to their personal sin, they made offerings to God at the Temple—a place where the Hebrew people believed that God’s space (God’s presence) and the space of humankind overlapped, as originally occurred in the Garden of Eden. The sacrifices made at the Temple were symbolic compensation to God for the damage done to holy relationships by human sin. The sacrifices provided a symbolic purification for the community and made it possible for God to continue to dwell among unholy people.

This process was best understood through the Day of Atonement. During this annual communal ritual, people from the community went to the Temple to make sacrifices and to symbolically repent of their sins against God and each other. The Day of Atonement was different from other offering days, however, in that the priest would make a sacrifice on behalf of the entire community. A lamb would be killed, and its blood spread throughout the Temple.
The blood was even spread in the most important room of the Temple: the Holy of Holies, the place where everyone believed God’s tangible presence dwelled. The blood was spread as a way to symbolically cleanse the area. Another lamb, called a scapegoat, was then sent out from the Temple into the wilderness. This lamb symbolically carried the sins of the community away from the presence of God and the people. Thus the community was purified, and the people were cleansed, allowing them to have a relationship with God.

Although this ritual was ordained by God, the process was not perfect because humans continued to sin. As such, the Day of Atonement had to be repeated every year. Writing for The Bible Project, Tim Mackie and Aeron Sullivan explain the shortcomings of the ritual: “There was a deficiency of some kind, not in the ritual, but in the humans surrounding the temple! It was their sin that kept piling up year after year. What was needed was something that would purify not only the temple, but the corrupt and selfish human heart.”

The remedy for humanity’s sin arrived in the form of Jesus Christ. It was the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—the sinless Son of God—that came as the fulfillment of the sacrificial process. By coming into this world, living as he did, then dying and rising again by God’s power, Jesus fulfilled the need of the sacrificial system. His life, death, and resurrection made it possible for God, the Holy One, to dwell among unholy people in a perfect way. Jesus proved to be the new space where God’s space (presence) and human space overlapped. Through him, humankind was, and is, truly forgiven and restored to full relationship with God.

Our relationship with God was framed through sin and understood through the sacrificial system. Now, our relationship with God is framed through love and understood through Jesus’ sacrifice. Through Jesus, our relationship with God is no longer based on a system, but through accepting and imitating the sacrificial acts Jesus exemplified through his life. Through Jesus’ covering act, our relationship with God is complete. That is what the good news of the gospel is all about. It found its beginnings in God’s love for what and who God created, and that love continued, even after humankind rebelled, and was ultimately fulfilled through Jesus.
In the preceding pages I have defined the good news of the gospel in a limited way, but will explore the components of this story more extensively through the words of the prophet Isaiah in the conclusion of this book. Until then, we will approach the gospel story through allusions to various Broadway plays as we explore the implications of God’s love for all creation and how God’s unwavering love should impact the way in which we live in relationship with our Creator, each other, and all that God has made.

Note