

THE STORYCHANGER

JOHN 4:1-41

# THE FAILED AUTHORS



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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# INTRODUCTION

81% of Americans feel that they have a book in them, and should write it. Of those who start to write, 97% never finish. Only 1 in 5 of books submitted to publishers get published. Of the half million or so books published in the US every year, the average sales are 250 copies each. By these measures, there are lots of failed authors in the US!

But there are actually even more failed authors than the official stats. Every single one of us is a failed author. We are all writing the stories of our lives and every single one of us has failed to write and publish the book we wanted. Some of us failed at the beginning, some of us fear failed endings. All of us have failed chapters. We are all failed authors.

And yet, no matter how bad and sad our story gets, we're still reluctant to hand our pen over to a better author, as we want to be the writers of our own story. The end result of all this is disappointing books, embarrassing books, tragic books, and horror books.

But there's a way to a better story, to a story worth writing and publishing. It involves admitting we've made a mess of our stories and then handing our pen (or keyboard) to Jesus to re-write our story. We see that happening in John 4, a chapter which basically says, **Admit you're a failed author, and ask Jesus to take the pen.**

## BACKGROUND

Jesus decided to travel from Judea for Galilee, taking a deliberate detour through Samaria on the way. Why? He knew there was a failed author there whose story he was going to re-write. When he arrived in Sychar of Samaria, he was tired and sat beside a well to refresh himself in the heat of the midday sun. That's when he sees Mrs. Samaritan, the failed author he came to meet.



So, how have I failed as an author?



# 1. WE ARE FAILED AUTHORS

One of Jesus's great skills is to get people to read their own stories, to get their manuscript out and face the reality of what they have written so far. That's what he did with Mrs. Samaritan. Let's read what she had written up to this point.

## A story of unquenched thirst (7-8, 13-15)

It's no accident that Jesus 'arranged' to meet Mrs. Samaritan at a well in the desert, that their conversation centered around thirst and water, and that his first words to her were, "**Give me a drink**" (7). The scene is a picture of her whole life, a life of unquenched thirst, a life of unfulfilled and unfulfilling desires, a life of drinking in pleasures that turned her soul into a desert.

That's why, after the initial interaction, Jesus said, "**If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water**" (10). He was contrasting her striving life with his giving life. "You work, work, work for thirst, thirst, thirst. I give, give, give for life, life, life."

When Jesus said, "**Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again**" (13), he wasn't primarily referring to the water in the well, but the sins that had characterized her life up to this point. He was saying, "You're only drinking deeper thirst." Her lifestyle was a deathstyle. Her drink was dust.

That's why he offers her another well of water, the satisfying spring of his salvation. "**But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life**" (14). It's a remarkable offer: You can get an internal and eternal well, a well of satisfaction inside you that will last forever.

Now that's an offer she cannot refuse. She drops her defenses and says, "**Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water**" (15). She's done with her story and wants a re-write.

## A story of hostile prejudice (9)

But there's more to this story than unquenched thirst. That's the main plot, but there are other sub-plots. For example, when Jesus first engaged her, she raised the long history of hatred and discrimination between the Jews and the Samaritans (9). It's clearly been a big issue in her life. Jesus refuses to be distracted or diverted and turns the conversation back to his water (10)

## A story of proud ignorance (10)

Like all of us, Mrs. Samaritan thought she was a religious expert. She knew biblical history (12) and biblical theology (20). But she didn't know God, fatal ignorance that Jesus highlighted: "**If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water**" (10). Again, Jesus refuses to be distracted or diverted and turns the conversation back to his water (13-14).

## A story of skillful lying (16-17)

Eventually Mrs. Samaritan asks for this water, but she's not thirsty enough yet to drink it. So, Jesus makes her face her real story. **Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."** **The woman answered him, "I have no husband."** **Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true"** (16-18). She told the truth, but not the whole truth. She told the truth in a way that told a lie. She was a skilled 'spin-doctor' but couldn't fool this spiritual doctor.

## A story of unsatisfying relationships

Five marriages and now a live-in boyfriend. She's on her sixth try for happiness in men. Each one promised satisfaction, but each one left her high and dry. Six dreams, six nightmares.

# CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

**What's your failed story?** Where have you failed as an author? Where would Jesus take you in your story? How do you try to distract from your story?

**How thirsty are you?** How have you tried to quench your thirst? How many ways have you tried to slake your thirst? Have you asked Jesus to give you living water?

FAILED AUTHORS  
ARE THIRSTY AUTHORS.



Some people have offered to re-write my story.  
Should I let them?



## 2. OTHERS ARE FAILED AUTHORS

It's not only that we make a mess of our stories, others make a mess of our stories too. People want to impose their own story on our lives and the culture subtly influences our story too. This too dooms our stories to the bargain books hopper.

### Men had failed her (17-18)

In that culture, women did not initiate divorces. No matter how bad their marriages were, they stayed in them because they were entirely dependent upon their husbands. Men had all the power and all the resources. So, when we read of five divorces, we are reading a story of serial abuse of a defenseless woman. They'd picked her up for a few brief pages of pleasure then walked out of her story and abandoned her. They took over her story, wrote their own on top of it, and then left her. Each one had promised her a better story and each one ruined her story. And now, the sixth, wouldn't even marry her. He just took from her and never gave himself to her.

### The culture had failed her (19-23)

The culture failed this woman in a number of ways. It allowed this kind of serial abuse of the weak. You can see the demeaning of women even in the disciples' reaction to her talking with Jesus (27). That was a false narrative way out of line with the Bible's narrative for women. We see Jesus here changing that narrative in his kind treatment of her.

But the culture also had a false religious narrative that focused on traditional and external matters such as the place of worship (20). Again. Jesus changes the narrative by his answer that focused on the truth not tradition, and on the spiritual nature of worship not the physical place of worship (21-24).

## CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

**Don't let others write your story.** Resist all other human and cultural authors who think they can write a better story for us. None of them are out for our good and will fail as badly as we do.

**Change your worship to change your story.** The climax of this water and thirst dialogue is worship. What we worship determines whether our stories will be satisfying and successful in the end.

CHANGE YOUR WORSHIP  
TO CHANGE YOUR STORY



I've failed and others have failed.  
So, who should I give my pen and paper to?



### 3. JESUS IS THE BEST AUTHOR

#### Jesus changed her story (25-28)

The woman said to him, “**I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.**” Jesus said to her, “**I who speak to you am he**” (25-26). We want the next line to be, “She believed him and gave her story over to him.” Instead, the disciples gate-crash the climactic scene: Just then his disciples came back (27). This ends the conversation with Jesus but it starts conversion to Jesus. It’s hinted at in the words, **So the woman left her water jar** (28). The symbol of thirst and failed attempts to quench it is left behind. What was central to her life is now peripheral. What she had focused on is now forgotten. The fact that Jesus changed her story is seen in her next words.

#### She told her story (29)

She left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, “**Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?**” (28-29). She left the town with a thirsty mouth but returned with a satisfied soul. She left a liar, she returned a truth-teller. She met the StoryChanger and wanted to tell her new story. The StoryChanger created a Storyteller who herself became a storychanger.

#### Jesus changed more stories (30, 39-42)

Many heard her new story about the StoryChanger and came out to hear his Story themselves. **Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did”** (40). They asked him to stay and tell them more. For two days he heard their stories, told his story, and changed their story with his (40-41). **They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”** One changed story changed many more stories.

### CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

**Has Jesus changed your story?** How bad does your story need to get before you hand over your pen? Give him the pen and paper. Ask him to take over your story to blot out the sins of your past and to write a new story going forward. No story is too bad or long that he can't change it.

**Has the StoryChanger made you a storyteller?** Who needs to hear your story today? As Mrs. Samaritan and the other Samaritans tell us, our story is not about us, but all about the StoryChanger. The StoryChanger can change your story and make you a storyteller and a storychanger.

THE STORYCHANGER  
CREATES STORYTELLERS.



Hear God's story > Change your story > Tell the story



# CONCLUSION



**PRAYER:** StoryChanger, I admit that no matter how hard I try, I am a failed author. Jesus, take the pen, change my story, and make me a storychanger.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you summarize your story so far? What are the chapter headings of your life?
2. Where have you failed as an author of your story?
3. What's your greatest thirst? How have you tried to satisfy that? What was the result?
4. How have others and the culture tried to write or influence your story?
5. In what ways does worship change your story?
6. How has Jesus changed your story? Who will you tell your changed story to this week?

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