

THE STORYCHANGER

JOSHUA 1:1-9

THE READERS



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

What story do you tell yourself about yourself? We all tell ourselves a story about ourselves. It may be a positive story or a negative story. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are all telling ourselves a story, and that inner story is often the most influential force in our lives. As Jim Loehr warned, "Since our destiny follows our stories, it's imperative that we do everything in our power to get our stories right."

How do we do that? How do we find out if we're telling ourselves a bad story with bad effects? And how do we change our inner story from a bad one to a good one? Joshua 1 helps us to identify our bad stories and replace them with good stories. The less we read our bad stories and the more we read good stories, the better our stories will be, especially the endings. **Read the best story for the best results.**

BACKGROUND

The StoryChanger series so far:

- **Our Messy Stories**
- **The First Perfect Story**
- **The Villain of the Story**
- **The Failed Authors**
- **The StoryChanger**
- **The New Story**
- **The Endorsements**
- **The Readers**

Joshua is named after its principal character and narrates how he took over from Moses and led the Israelites into the Promised Land.



What story are we reading and what are its effects?



1. A BAD STORY HAS SAD EFFECTS

What is our bad story?

Joshua was at a turning point in his life. He'd been a faithful second-in-command, but now God was calling him to fill Moses's massive shoes. It would have been a daunting task for anyone, but it seemed to have been especially challenging for Joshua. Perhaps he was comfortable in his deputy or assistant role, but never saw himself as the leader, especially when his job description was "Conquer Canaan." This was not a job Joshua wanted and he started writing a terrible story about what it was going to be like.

What was Joshua thinking? Although it's not explicit, his internal story is implied in God's repeated words to him.

- Three times God said to him, "**Be strong**" (6, 7, 9).
- Three times God said to him: "**Be very courageous**" (6, 7, 9).
- Three times God said to him: "**Follow my Word**" (7, 8, 9).
- Three times God said to him: "**You will be successful**" (6, 7, 8)
- Two times God said to him, "**I am with you**" (5, 9)

So, what story was Joshua telling himself? Its five parts correspond with God's five messages.

- Part One: **I'm weak**
- Part Two: **I'm scared**
- Part Three: **I don't know what to do**
- Part Four: **I'm going to fail**
- Part Five: **I'm all alone**

What are the sad effects

Obviously, such an internal story was having a huge negative impact on Joshua's mindset, his worldview, his feelings, his words, his decisions, and even his appearance and body language. He felt feeble, fearful, foolish, a failure, and forsaken. This was not good for him, and certainly not good for the two million people he was called to lead into battle.

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

1. What's your inner story. Sometimes we hear and read our own inner story so much that we don't even realize we're doing it. We've got so used to our inner voice that we're not conscious of it any more. But that story is there and it's having an immense impact.

Jim Loehr of the *Human Performance Institute* has specialized in helping top performers identify the inner stories that are spoiling their life story. He's found that most people tell inner stories about five major subjects: **Work, Family, Health, Happiness, and Friendships.** I would add **Faith** to this list, and, in fact, I'd argue that what we believe about God, especially our relationship to him, is more important and influential than any other subject.

Loehr gets his clients to write out their inner story. That can take a few days and many re-writes. He then gets them to **title** their story, analyze the **text**, identify the dominant **theme**, hear the overall **tone**, and define the **target** (their life purpose, or ultimate mission). What does your story look like using these five criteria? What's your **title, text, theme, tone, and target?**

Once you see and hear the story you are reading and hearing most, you'll be able to decide whether it's true or not, and especially if its five parts align. The best authors begin with the ending, they know how they want the story to end. Everything else is aligned with that and works towards it. So why not begin by asking yourself that question: What's your target? Your life mission? How would you like to be remembered? What do you want written on your gravestone?

2. What's the impact of your story? Every story we read changes us to one degree or another. None more so than our inner story which we read and re-read multiple times a day. Listen to some of these stories and feel the impact of them:

"I don't feel I'm doing a good job anywhere—home, work, family, self. I'm overwhelmed."

"I accomplish all of this, but I lost God, the most important thing in my life. I lost my spirituality."

"I spend too little time playing with my kids. They look forward to the babysitter coming because she plays with them more than I do."

"My biggest feeling about myself is complete disappointment."

"My current life story is sad and depressing...My health is a 2, work a 3, happiness and friendship each a 2...The dominant theme in my life is distrust."

Here are titles of stories I've heard recently: "I'm a cheap whore." "I'm fat." "I'm an imposter." "I'm a loser." "I'm unloveable." "I don't belong." What's your title and how's it impacting you?

A BAD STORY HAS
A SAD SEQUEL



How do I change my inner story?
Who can give me a better story to read?



2. THE BEST STORY HAS THE BEST EFFECTS

God tells us a better story through his Word

God saw inside Joshua, heard his internal story, and replaced it with a five-part story.

- Part One: **You will be strong** (6, 7, 9)
- Part Two: **You will be courageous** (6, 7, 9)
- Part Three: **You will follow my plan** (7, 8, 9)
- Part Four: **You will be successful** (6, 7, 8)
- Part Five: **You will have me with you** (5, 9)

Can you imagine how this Story changed Joshua's story? We don't have to imagine, for we have a record of it in the Bible. It changed Joshua and it changed history.

God tells us a better story through his people

God gave Joshua a new story to read, and then confirmed its five-part message by the people's response to him (16-18). In some ways, the people knew Joshua better than he did. They could hear his Story better than he could and spoke God's story into his life in a life-changing way. Next week, we'll look more closely at how God uses the community of God's people to change our stories with his Story.

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Be courageous. It takes a ton of courage to change the inner story we're reading. Even when it's damaging us, it's a story we're used to and have grown to accept. Joshua's greatest courage wasn't taking on giant warriors but taking on the gigantic lies in his story. That battle for the millions of neural pathways in our brain is the most ferocious battle ever waged. I've a friend whose Dad physically and psychologically abused him. It devastated his confidence and self-worth for decades. But later in life, when his Dad tried to intimidate him again, this time with silence and facial expressions, he turned to his Dad and said, "I'm not scared of you any more. I will not let you terrorize me again." It not only led to freedom for my friend, and a new sense of dignity, but it began a new and healthier chapter in his relationship with his Dad too. Whoever wrote your inner story, if it wasn't God, you need to go to war to reclaim your brain and re-wire it with God's Story.

Be convinced. You're not going to read God's Story unless you're convinced that you need it. So let me persuade you. Australian research found that "If pastors could do only one thing to help people grow in their relationship with Christ...they would inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read and reflect on the Bible." Similarly, *The Center for Bible Engagement* discovered that "the number one thing you can do for yourself spiritually is read the Bible four times a week or more. Read it this frequently, and your life looks completely different to those who don't read the Bible, or read it less than that." Another survey that resulted in the book *What 1000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth*, found that "Reflection on Scripture is, by far, the most influential personal spiritual practice."

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Be consistent. If Bible reading is the best way to change our story with God's Story, it is vitally important that we read it regularly. Here are some tips to help you read God's Story consistently:

- 1. Small.** Start small. Most Bible reading plans are too ambitious. I reckon only about 10% of people who start them, continue with them for more than a month. If you can, great. But if you can't, don't give up, but make it do-able. Like every other exercise, short and often is better than big and rare. Five minutes a day every day will do you much more good than 30 minutes whenever you can find time.
- 2. Same.** Do it at the same time and in the same place. Our bodies and minds love routine and rhythm. After doing something for 25-30 days, it becomes instinctive and a normal everyday part of life. Our mind takes cues from the time and the environment to remind us to start "Bible reading mode."
- 3. Simple.** Keep it simple. Like physical exercise, we don't start with the hardest weights, but with the easier ones. Likewise start with a Gospel or with the Psalms rather than with Romans or Leviticus.
- 4. Shut.** Shut out distractions. 90% of Christians find early morning the best time for daily Bible reading (usually after a shower and coffee!) because that's the least distracting time. Turn off digital devices and don't let the Internet steal your fresh mind and write the world's story on your mind before God writes his.
- 5. Study.** Get into study mode and use study helps. Ask questions: How does this connect with my story? How does this change my story? How can I share this story? If you're starting out or struggling, use a Study Bible to give you a little help in understanding God's Story without overwhelming you with extra reading. Or use the Living the Bible daily podcast. Above all pray for the greatest Study Help, the Holy Spirit to write God's Story over your own.
- 6. Share.** Write down one verse, or one thought, or one idea from your reading, maybe on an index card. Carry it with you and look at it when you eat or drink throughout the day. You can build a box of cards to re-read at various points in the future. Sharing it with someone every day will also help you to be accountable.
- 7. Start.** As Nike says, Just do it!

FOR A BETTER STORY
READ THE. BEST STORY



Hear > Change > Tell

CONCLUSION



PRAYER: StoryChanger, help me to read your story most and my story least so that I can be changed for the better not the worse. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. "Our destinies follow our stories." Do you agree with this or not? Why or why not?
2. What's the title, text, theme, tone, and target of your story?
3. What parts of these five areas are true or false? What parts are aligned or out of line? What do you need to change?
4. Which parts of God's Story will you use to change your story?
5. What's your story about God and your relationship to him?
6. How will you get more of God's Story into your life and more of your own out of your life?

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