

THE PERIL OF STICKING TO YOUR OWN STORY

John 5:2-16; Ephesians 2:1-7

Today's topic: How we use narratives to shape how we understand ourselves and how we use these narratives to shape how others see us.

THE STORY ABOUT THE LAME MAN WHO APPEARED TO WANT HEALING

At first glance, what do we see?

At second glance, what do we learn?

Verses 6-7, *"When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me."*

THE POWER OF A NARRATIVE AND HOW WE LIVE BY THEM

"We are shaped by our stories. In fact, our stories, once in place, determine much of our behavior without regard to their accuracy or helpfulness. Once these stories are stored in our minds, they stay there largely unchallenged until we die. And here is the main point: these narratives are running (and often ruining) our lives. That is why it is crucial to get the right narratives."

—James Bryan Smith, from "The Good and Beautiful God"

BECOMING A CHRISTIAN MEANS CHANGING YOUR NARRATIVE

Verse 14. *"Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."*

What did Jesus mean by "do not sin anymore?" "Do not live your life separate from the life God wants to give to you. Ephesians 4:18: *"They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."*

THE TWO WORDS "BUT GOD" COMPLETELY CHANGES EVERYTHING!

Ephesians 2:1-7

John 5:2-16

“Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” ⁷The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” ⁸Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” ⁹And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” ¹¹But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” ¹²They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” ¹³Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. ¹⁴Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.”

Ephesians 2:1-7

“You were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DEVOTION:

1. What narratives or stories have you heard while growing up that have helped to shape you as a person? Can you think of two positive stories that your parents or a close friend has shared with you?
2. Read John 5:2-16. In this story we read of Jesus encountering a man who had been lame for 38 years. Jesus asked what seemed to be an obvious question, “Do you want to be healed?” Why do you suppose Jesus asked this man this question? Could it be that this man didn’t want to be healed? Why or why not?
3. Do you know of individuals in your life who, for some reason, don’t want to be “healed?” Why should Christians desire to be healed by Jesus?
4. Read Ephesians 2:1-7. This passage starts with a negative narrative of who we were before we became Christians. Was there a time in your life when this narrative was true of you? The two key words that changes this narrative is, “but God” in verse 4. How should these two words change the worse stories you have heard about your life or the life of another Christian? How can you replace any of your discouraging life narratives with your new narrative in Christ?