



Barefoot Ministries

Message Outlines: Living According to False Stories

Topic/Theme:

Discovering The False Stories Which Keep Us In Bondage

Scripture:

Exodus 1-2

Get to the Point:

Our freedom in Christ allows us to abandon the false stories which have guided our lives.

Context Commentary:

The term “Hebrews,” refers to any group of marginal people who have no social standing, own no land, and who endlessly disrupt ordered society. They are “low-class folks” who are feared, excluded, and despised. Under a regime of slavery, subjects become objects. The Hebrews, who have just been identified as a people, are in the process of losing their identity. They are slaves of another nation, not really a people in their own right, for to be in the service of Pharaoh means harshness and bondage. They lack the freedom to be what they are called to be—in other words, to discover their true identity as children of God created for freedom.

For these folk, forced labor was the rule of the day. A typical Hebrew brickmaker would be expected to make 2,000 bricks a day! Rarely was that quota met. The result was punishment: a rod across the back, verbal abuse, deprivation. Degrading, brutal conditions were calculated to take the spirit out of the people—and to force them to adopt the new identity that the Egyptians had for them. In so doing, the Hebrew people were forced to move from an identity that found its source in being God’s people to an identity which found its source in serving Pharaoh.

In these passages, the Pharaoh is not even given a name. Thus the focus is not on him as a historical figure, but as a symbol for the anti-creation forces of death which oppose the God of life. To be in the service of Pharaoh means lack of freedom. In fact, when the

mid-wives refuse to follow Pharaoh's instructions, Pharaoh becomes an angel of death, as he now determines to cut off life at its beginning point by ordering the drowning of the Hebrew baby boys in the Nile River. There is an old saying that, "Egypt is the gift of the Nile," for the primary source of Egypt's life in ancient times was the Nile's annual flooding which rendered the bordering land fertile. Therefore, Pharaoh's instruction is both literally drastic and symbolically powerful. What gives life to Egypt is to bring death to the Hebrews.

However, as we see in the narrative, God is always on the side of life. In fact, God always enters on the side of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the powerless because they have no one else to stand up for them. When we discover our true identity in God, we understand that the Kingdom's ethic is not based on power and money, but on love and grace.

Outline and Options:

Icebreaker: Whopper

Give each student an index card and a pencil. Ask them to write four statements about themselves—three of these should be true, but one should be a "whopper" which is untrue but disguised to be true. Make sure the true statements are little-known facts so the whopper sounds true by comparison. Allow about four minutes for this. Have each student read their four statements, and allow the other students an opportunity to try and guess which statement is the whopper.

Early in the message, you can reference this activity as being indicative of the false stories which shape our lives and tell a lot about us.

Outline:

1. Our stories are important
 - a. They define who we are and tell a lot about us.
 - i. Share a few stories from the speaker's life which have influenced who the speaker is today.
 - b. Stories give us a sense of place because they remind us where we belong
 - i. Share at least one story from the speaker's life which helped the speaker identify where they fit into a family/group/organization, etc.

2. The people we find in Exodus 1-2 also had stories which defined them.
 - a. Joseph's story – from slave to ruler. Consequently, Joseph's descendants also grew up in Egypt with special status.
 - b. However, a new Pharaoh arose who forgot (“did not know”) about Joseph and what he had done for Egypt. All this Pharaoh can see (from his perspective) is the potential for revolution that Joseph's descendants are.
 - c. He therefore has all of Joseph's descendants put into slavery for he sees them “as a threat.”
3. In Exodus 1-2, we see two different stories at work.
 - a. There are the “haves” – the feeling is splendor, luxury, progress, a cultural zenith. These are the Egyptians, which includes, by default, Moses.
 - b. There are the “have-nots” - the feeling is anonymity, exhaustion, misery, a bottomless pit.
 - i. Forced labor is the rule of the day – 2,000 bricks per day!
 - ii. Degrading brutal conditions were designed to take the spirit out of the people—not just to keep them from fighting for independence, but in a very real sense, to make them forget who they had been.

Video Clip/Drama Option:

Show the clip from “Prince of Egypt” where the workers are toiling under the heavy load and being beaten.

4. The Hebrews lived in the midst of awful conditions and stories.
 - a. Pharaoh's order to midwives – kill the baby boys
 - i. Most were drowned in the river Nile.
 - ii. For Egyptians, the river Nile represented life and recreation.

- iii. It is ironic that what gives life to Egypt is to bring death to the Hebrews.
 - iv. The Hebrews, who had once been honored guests of the Pharaoh and his country, now endure not only brutal slavery but genocide.
- b. Under a regime of slavery, people become objects.
- i. The Hebrews who have once been a people with an identity have now lost that identity.
 - ii. Just as the slave owners' intend, the oppressed must learn that their well-being depends exclusively on Pharaoh's good will.
 - iii. The idea is to get them thinking that things could never be better than they are now. This is a FALSE story.
- c. Eventually, Pharaoh begins to make things even harder.
- i. The people have to make bricks without straw. This is a virtually impossible task!!!
 - ii. The people are told yet again that they have no purpose in life except to serve the Egyptians.
 - iii. Due to this, a crisis in identity develops.
 - 1. The Egyptians continually told them that they were worthless, nothing, dirt, good for nothing except menial labor.
 - 2. The people's prior identity—that of being Jacob's descendants, the people of "Yahweh" (the Hebrew name God gave himself)—has been lost. They now only know

the new identity which has been given to them—that of slave!

3. An amazing thing happens—the Hebrews begin to live according to the identity which they have been given!
 - a. This affects the way they live, act, speak, and respond to others—even in their relationship to God!

Illustration Option:

In the television show, *Alias*, Sidney Bristow lived much of her adult life according to the false story she had been given. She was told that she was working for a secret branch of the CIA. She took great pride in her job, feeling that things were going well, and that she was really making a difference in the world. Unbeknownst to her at the time, the reality was that she was working for a terrorist organization called “ST6.” She had built her entire life upon the lie that she had been told, and had (unknowingly) acted accordingly—killing the good guys while letting the bad guys go free. (You might even want to see if you can find a clip from one of the first two years of the series that represents this—it is available on DVD).

5. All of us live according to a story that impacts how we think, speak and act.
 - a. We live today in a cultural Egypt, where there are many voices telling us stories, trying to convince us to change our identity, to adopt a new identity, so we will be well-liked, popular, athletic, beautiful, etc.
 - b. Have the speaker share one or two short stories of how she or he had lived their life according to a false story. Possible stories could include: living a double life, addictions, alcohol/drugs, struggles with pornography, relationship abuses, etc.—be sure that it is appropriate for the group.
 - c. What are some of the stories the world wants us to buy into today that runs counter to what God’s Story is?
 - i. Look out for #1

- ii. If I'm going to make it in this life, it's totally up to me.
- iii. All religions are the same—we'll all wind up in heaven.
- iv. I'm not good enough—God can't love me.
- v. My parents are Christians, so I'm OK.
- vi. I've got to DO more to be a good Christian.
- vii. God could NEVER forgive me for what I've done!

Interactive Activity Option:

Allow students to break into small groups and discuss the effects of living according to the false stories listed above. Allow them to brainstorm other possible false stories that teenagers today might live by.

- 6. The problem with false stories is that they ALWAYS result in bondage.
 - a. The Hebrews' bondage was literal.
 - b. Our bondage, while of a spiritual sense, is the more dangerous.
 - c. In fact, even when we might be bound in a physical sense, we can still be free spiritually.

Illustration Option:

The Underground Chinese Church Movement. Freedom of expression is extremely limited. Only state-sponsored churches are acceptable. If a person is found attending a non-endorsed church, they can be thrown into prison, and possibly even killed. Yet, even in the midst of this horrendous persecution (outward bondage), the church is growing in incredible numbers because the people have experienced spiritual freedom from the bondage of sin.

- d. So how do we move out of the bondage these stories bring?
- 7. We can only escape the bondage when we experience the freedom that Christ brings.

Video Clip/Drama Option:

Show the clip from the movie, *The Lion King*, where Simba hears his Father speak from the "starry sky" to tell him, "Remember who you are." Show enough before and after this scene for the group to get a feel for what is happening. It was only when Simba

discovered his *real* identity, who he had always been from the very beginning, that he was able to shed the false stories told to him by his uncle, Scar. Similarly, it is only when we discover the identity God has had in store for us since the beginning of time that we can discard the false identity and accompanying bondage we've been living under.

Illustration Option:

"I have a friend named Monty Roberts who owns a horse ranch in San Ysidro. He has let me use his house to put on fund-raising events to raise money for youth at risk programs.

The last time I was there he introduced me by saying, "I want to tell you why I let Jack use my horse. It all goes back to a story about a young man who was the son of an itinerant horse trainer who would go from stable to stable, race track to race track, farm to farm and ranch to ranch, training horses. As a result, the boy's high school career was continually interrupted. When he was a senior, he was asked to write a paper about what he wanted to be and do when he grew up.

"That night he wrote a seven-page paper describing his goal of someday owning a horse ranch. He wrote about his dream in great detail and he even drew a diagram of a 200-acre ranch, showing the location of all the buildings, the stables and the track. Then he drew a detailed floor plan for a 4,000-square-foot house that would sit on a 200-acre dream ranch.

"He put a great deal of his heart into the project and the next day he handed it in to his teacher. Two days later he received his paper back. On the front page was a large red F with a note that read, 'See me after class.'

"The boy with the dream went to see the teacher after class and asked, 'Why did I receive an F?'

"The teacher said, 'This is an unrealistic dream for a young boy like you. You have no money. You come from an itinerant family. You have no resources. Owning a horse ranch requires a lot of money. You have to buy the land. You have to pay for the original breeding stock and later you'll have to pay large stud fees. There's no way you could ever do it.' Then the teacher added, 'If you will rewrite this paper with a more realistic goal, I will reconsider your grade.'

"The boy went home and thought about it long and hard. He asked his father what he should do. His father said, 'Look, son, you have to make up your own mind on this. However, I think it is a very important decision for you.' "Finally, after sitting with it for a week, the boy turned in the same paper, making no changes at all.

He stated, 'You can keep the F and I'll keep my dream.'"

Monty then turned to the assembled group and said, "I tell you this story because you are sitting in my 4,000-square-foot house in the middle of my 200-acre horse ranch. I still have that school paper framed over the fireplace." He added, "The best part of the story is that two summers ago that same schoolteacher brought 30 kids to camp out on my ranch for a week." When the teacher was leaving, he said, "Look, Monty, I can tell you this now. When I was your teacher, I was something of a dream stealer. During those years I stole a lot of kids' dreams. Fortunately you had enough gumption not to give up on yours."

"Don't let anyone steal your dreams. Follow your heart, no matter what."

(By Jack Canfield, from *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, Copyright 1993 by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen)

Monty wasn't willing to live by the false stories others thought he should live by. He knew that he was destined for something greater.

Interactive Activity Option:

Give each student an index card. Ask them to write down one false story that they have tended to live their lives by. Then have them pair up with a partner and share with that person what the false story is. Have the pairs commit to holding one another accountable in abandoning these false stories and living according to God's Story.

Further Study Resources:

Anderson, Herbert. *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and Divine*. Jossey-Bass, 2001. (This book would be great for the youth leader, and could be useful for older teens or college students.)

DeMoss, Nancy Leigh. *Lies Women Believe: And the Truth that Sets Them Free*. Moody, 2002. (While directed towards women, teenage girls will also benefit from this book. You may not agree with every "lie" that the author presents, the book serves as a great discussion starter to talk about the various lies we might live by.)