

Open Letter

August 20, 2016

To: Max Lucado & Randy Frazee, Christian leaders & authors of *The Story*
From: Joe Vandegriff, ordinary Christian & author of nothing

Your book, *The Story*, is such a good idea I'm sad to not recommend it - because it has a serious omission. The idea of a *Reader's Digest* version of the Bible is very helpful. It arranges the Bible story chronologically and leaves out redundant parts and minor themes. But your editing cut out the Old Testament prophet's powerful message of social justice. This is the voice of God to the nation of God's people who were ignoring the poor and the stranger and outcasts. Seeing as how Jesus used this message as his mission statement (Luke 4:16-21), leaving it out of *The Story* is unthinkable. It limits God's grand message to personal sins and salvation to the neglect of the sins of society, such as racism, materialism, etc. The Old Testament prophets are very clear that worship without social justice will not satisfy God's desire for His people (as in Isaiah 1). It is because of God's righteousness and justice that He holds His people accountable for the people on the margins of society.

Any expression of Christianity that does not include a strong emphasis on social justice is not faithful to the Bible. I call on you to revise your book to include the full Story! Until then, I cannot recommend your book.

----- reply August 22, 2016 -----

Joe,

From Max:

Your concerns are good ones, answered by this reminder: *The Story* is a tool to study the Bible, not the entire Bible. Its intent is to guide the reader through the big picture of Scripture in a defined time...in this case, nine months. To accomplish this, the editors had to eliminate some very important sections of Scripture. (I have my own passages that I regret were removed.) The extractions are not a reflection on the value of a particular passage, but rather the necessary step to create a manageable tool.

Keep in mind that "The Story" is targeted to illiterate Bible students...those who are intimidated by the immensity of Scripture. This abridged text will hopefully whet their appetites to study the entire Bible.

Margaret,
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"Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you." Psalm 116:7

----- August 25, 2016 -----

Margaret,

Thank you for your kind reply. And timely, too.

I would like to press the issue further by saying that what I see missing in *The Story* is not just some favorite verse or two of mine. It is a major theme about God's dealings with mankind. Reading the Bible for almost 50 years, I did not see it myself until my eyes were opened by many other recent authors, most notably Richard Stearns, president of World Vision, in *The Hole in Our Gospel*, and others like Dallas Willard, N.T. Wright, Walter Brueggemann, to name a few. I cannot accept the view that God's desire for social justice is not part of the "big picture" of the Bible. So I claim that the editing of *The Story* has made a Bible with a hole in it that leaves out God's care for the poor and oppressed and God's demand for social justice from any people or nation that claim allegiance with God.

I applaud this effort to make the Bible more accessible to the masses. I sense a growing general concern for social justice, especially in the younger generation who are Biblically illiterate and do not realize their concerns are reflected in the Bible. But how can they know it if social justice is edited out of the Bible? How can they know God's message contains the remedy for the world's pressing problems?

I beg you to please pass this message on to Rev. Lucado and what I would suggest as a remedy to *The Story*. Replace the OT chapter about Elijah on Mt. Carmel with a compilation of the many verses in the prophets on God's demands for righteousness and justice, even including Psalm 72 where the king of Israel is called on to use his powers, authority, and resources in defense of the poor. In the NT, to include in the early part of Jesus' life His mission statement message to his hometown in Luke 4.

So I must be crazy, being a simple layperson, instructing such a great Christian leader and author of many books on the Bible. I hope my voice would be one of many to challenge Rev. Lucado to see social justice as part of God's "upper story".