



## THE STORY



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**Scripture:** The Story – Chapter 7

In 1992, Cara Wood was 17 years old and like most students, along with her studies, she was working a part time job. She was a waitress at local diner in her hometown located about 25 kilometres from Cleveland, Ohio. By all accounts, she was a good employee – bright, friendly and helpful. One particular customer, Bill Cruyton, liked her so much that he always sat in her section. Cruyton, was a widower with no children. He went to the restaurant daily, for his meals, yes but maybe more importantly, for some company. He and Cara became friends.

In addition to being his regular waitress, she helped him around his house. She ran errands for him. In fact, Cara Wood became so important to him, that Cruyton rewrote his will, making her the main beneficiary. In November of 1992, at the age of 82, Bill Cruyton died of heart failure. When his will was disclosed and his assets dispersed, Cara Wood inherited a half a million dollars from his estate. Now that's a tip?!

An Inheritance. The Merriam- Webster Dictionary defines inheritance as the acquisition of a possession, condition, or trait from past generations

Perhaps you have been on the receiving end of an inheritance. Maybe it was monetary. A survey released by the BMO Financial Group recently stated that the average inheritance Canadians can expect when loved ones pass away is just under \$100 000. And many count on it to help them in their retirement years. In fact, it is expected that \$750 billion will be bequeathed from aging relatives to their next of kin over the next decade.

That's a 50% increase from the last decade. Now let me just pause for a moment to say something to my own children. Don't get too excited. Mom and I, we bring down the average.

For some of you, perhaps it wasn't money that you inherited but a possession. A couple of years ago, I received a parcel in the mail. When I opened it, I was surprised to find a green teddy bear. I recognized it immediately. It had belonged to a friend of mine, Rhea. She was a member of my church in Waterloo. Rhea and I used to meet regularly at the local mall for coffee and a chat. Born with Spina Bifida, Rhea had been confined to a wheel chair all her life. She carried this green teddy bear most places she went. I used to tease her about taking it from her. Just before she died, she asked her mom to send it to me. A special inheritance.

Maybe you have a cherished possession that you received from a loved one who has passed away. Can I ask you an important question? Can you roll your tongue? I can't roll my tongue. No matter how hard I try and it has been the source of immense frustration in my home, as I am surrounded by tongue rollers. To be able to roll your tongue is a genetic trait inherited through our DNA from our parents. Thankfully, my children received this special talent from their mother. Rolling your tongue, along with dimples, clefts in the chin, eye colour, hair on your knuckles and nearsightedness. You can thank your parents for those.

Do you have a free ear lobe that hangs a little? I am not talking it hangs because you have put quarter size studs in your ear during your teenager years. I mean naturally. Does it hang a little or do you have an attached ear lobe? You inherited that. Try something with me, without thinking about it, clasp your hands together. Now look down at them. Which thumb is on top? Your left or right? You inherited the way that you do that. For most, it is the left thumb on top.

Inheritance. The acquisition of a possession, condition, or trait from past generations.

If you have been with us over the past several weeks, you know that we as an entire church are on this 31 week adventure through the bible. God's Story and our place in it. During our time together we having been using the scriptural resource entitled The Story. Let me just take a moment to review where this journey has taken us so far.

We began with creation and the Garden and we see that our creator God's vision right from the beginning was to be in relationship with humanity. But sin enters into the picture and mars that vision.

But all hope is not lost. God promises to remove the roadblock and bring humanity back to him and he starts by building a nation through the lineage of Abraham. In choosing Abraham, God reveals what will be a pattern all throughout scripture. God chooses unlikely people, the ones that we probably wouldn't. Not the smartest or best looking (exhibit #1 me) but those with hearts set on him, those that demonstrate a measure of faith.

Abraham had a son Isaac, who had a son, Jacob, who has a son Joseph who through a series of good news, bad news scenarios, Joseph saves the Israelite people from a famine as they now settle in and around Egypt. Generations later, these Israelites, God chosen people find themselves enslaved to the Egyptians but God again, provides a redeemer, Moses; who leads the people out of Egypt through the waters of the parted Red Sea and into the desert.

They are headed towards the land that God has in mind for them, the land he promised to them through Abraham all those years before in the book of Genesis. This was to be their inheritance.

During this time, God reaffirms his promises and covenant with his people in the desert by giving them the Ten Commandments but the Israelites soon begin to grumble and complain to God and to their leaders. They lack the faith to enter their inheritance, the land. And instead wander aimlessly in the desert for 40 years. They fail to take possession of what God has waiting for them in their lifetime.

But, in the book of Joshua in the Old Testament, chapter 7 in your books, a new day is dawning, Moses is now dead and God has chosen a new man, Joshua, to lead his people. And a new generation of Israelites are now ready to cross over the Jordan River and set foot in the land God is giving them. Can you imagine? After all the years, the anticipation and some trepidation. They were right there now. So close.

I remember the elementary school I attended in Kitchener, Franklin Public School. The library, where you could throw the pillows on the floor and read. It was my first exposure to the mysterious dark continent, of Africa. It was in that library that I would leaf through the pages of National Geographic magazine, picture after picture of Africa. Oh yes, my young buddies and I would giggle at the pictures of native tribes clad in outfits a lot more revealing than we were used to in the 1970's.

But it was in National Geographic that I first discovered the beauty of Victoria Falls. Located on the border of what is today the African nations of Zambia and Zimbabwe, Victoria Falls has been described as one of the seven natural wonders of the world. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that I would view this beautiful land from anything beyond the pages of a magazine.

But in 2010, almost forty years later, I not only stepped to the edge of the majestic falls but I also zipped lined across the mouth of the expanse. It was truly awe inspiring and a little nerve wracking. After all those years to actually be there in the land. Beyond my imagination.

Perhaps you have had an experience like this. To finally set foot in a place or a land that has captured your attention and sense of wonder over the years. It gives us a bit of an idea of what it must have been like for these Israelite people. This was the land that has been spoken about for generations amongst their people and now here they were, about to take the first step. And as they stood there, on the cusp of this historic occasion, notice what the Lord says to Joshua in Joshua 1:2-6 or page 89 of your books. Listen to this language carefully. God speaking to Joshua,

*Joshua in Joshua 1:2-6 or page 89*

*“Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. 3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. 4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. 5 No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.*

Did you notice the language God uses here?

\*get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—

\*I will give you every place where you set your foot,

\*you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them

When someone gives you something, what do you need to do? You receive it. And that is different than taking. Do you see that?

Contrary to popular opinion, at no point did God call Joshua to take the land, or earn the land or purchase the land. No, he was to receive what God was giving to them. Do you know the key word that is repeated all throughout the book of Joshua? Anyone? It is the word, inheritance. The acquisition or receiving of a possession, condition, or trait from past generations. Anyone care to guess how many times the word “inheritance” is used in Joshua? Forty four (44) times in the NIV translation. That is almost as many Tim Horton coffee shops as we have on the streets of London. And when something is repeated in the bible we need to take notice.

In Joshua 1:2, the Lord says to the people, I am giving you the land. It is their inheritance going all the way back to the book of Genesis. When God calls Abraham to leave his home country and go to a land he will show him. This land was given to his chosen people, the Israelites. The transaction has already been completed. Victory is already certain because God has assured it. All God is asking of Joshua and the Israelites is to step in and receive it.

For whatever reason, we, humanity just seem to struggle to receive though don't we? Maybe it is because we fear that strings are attached. Or perhaps we have this self-impose pressure to reciprocate because we don't like the feeling of being in someone's debt. Or maybe it is simply because it has been driven into our minds that it is better to give than receive. Whatever it is, we struggle with receiving, don't we? But do you know what it interesting in this story we find ourselves in today?

The moment that the Israelites step out of the wilderness and receive the land from God, step across the raging Jordan River and into their long promised inheritance? It marked the beginning of

some of the best days in the history of the Israelite people. And remember, this is not the wild frontier that has never been inhabited. The land is occupied by some of the largest, evil and barbaric people groups to ever exist. But this is a new day for Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, they hold fast to God's promises,

\*I will give you every place where you set your foot,

\*No one will be able to stand against you

\*I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

\*Be strong and courageous,

Joshua and his armies receive these promises and over the next seven years they defeat over thirty kings. They are victorious in over twenty battles. And they reclaim an inheritance of over 25 000 square kilometers. You read about it in the pages of chapter 7 of the story and the book of Joshua in the bible. For seven years they were outnumbered but never out powered. They seemed to be the underdogs but how can that be, God was with them. He had assured them victory and they had the faith to believe it. For seven years, they were unstoppable. Oh there were a few minor blips along the way. There were some slips ups but these were the glory years of Israel. Evil was eradicated in the land and hope was restored. The people settled in and received what God had promised to them.

*Joshua 21:43-45 or page 99*

*So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. 44 The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hands. 45 Not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled.*

The book of Joshua has been called one of the history books of the bible. Joshua, along with Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles all outline factual history of the God chosen people, the Israelites. But Joshua is not just a history book, it is also a theology book because it reveals the mind and the ways of God. God will take us out of our wilderness and give us a new season of life as well.

Do you believe that today? Maybe you sit here and you feel like the Israelites did, like Shane described last week. You are just wandering around in the wilderness, going in circles. You are lost, can't get your bearings. The GPS keeps beeping, Signal not found or Signal lost. Does that describe you today?

I chatted with a woman this week and that seems to sum up her situation quite well these days. Angry and bitter about some things that have happened to her and her family in the past, ten, 15, 20 years ago. But she is just unable to let those things go and she finds herself grumbling and complaining. Immersed in a cycle of negativity that is affecting her physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. And it is impacting those around her. Wandering, in circles. She can't find her way out, past all of it. Does that sound familiar?

And that is not to say that we can never vent or complain or grieve. Life can be difficult sometimes can't it? Some things just don't seem fair and right. Every once in a while, it actually feels therapeutic to wallow in it a bit. To just release it. That's okay. A good chunk of the book of Psalms in the bible is written by people who are venting to God.

*Psalm 10:1*

*Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*

*Psalm 22:1*

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

*Psalm 42:9*

*I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me?"*

Maybe you relate to some of these sentiments? I think they are pretty normal at times for those of us trying to live a life of faith in a fallen world. But take them to God, he receives it. It is interesting that all of these Psalms start with hopelessness and in the end there is this realization by the author that God has actually been there all the time.

In this world we will have trouble that is a certainty, the bible says so. But look what else the bible says. In Isaiah 43:18-19, God is speaking to his people who have had some hardships. Listen to what he says,

*Isaiah 43:18-19*

*18 "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. 19 See, I am doing a new thing!"*

It is normal and natural to lament the pain and hurt of your past, but God is reminding his people, and he reminds all of us; you don't have to stay there. Don't dwell on it. Don't keep wandering in circles. Instead use what God is teaching you through the pain and hurt as a launch pad for the new thing that he wants to do in your life. Step out of your circumstance and step into your inheritance.

Just like the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua. They stepped out of their circumstances, 40 years of aimless wandering, grumbling and complaining about God and their leaders and stepped into their inheritance. They received the land God had in mind to give them for generations. When they finally did that in faith, it was a new day. It was one of the most hope filled times in their history.

You too have an inheritance did you know that? We have an inheritance. Oh, it may not be a multimillion dollar win fall or a prized possession or cute little dimples on your cheek but I would suggest to you, this inheritance is way more

significant. Those of us who are followers of Jesus, Christians. We have an inheritance.

*Ephesians 1:13-14*

*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory.*

Do you know what happens to us, when we make a decision to follow Jesus? We are sealed. It is like a big piece of saran wrap was wound around us for protection. It keeps the goodness in and that which seeks to ruin or destroy us out. The seal is the Holy Spirit. When we become Christians, we are automatically sealed. Protected by the Holy Spirit. But there is more.

*Galatians 3:29*

*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

As Christians, we are sons and daughters of the living God. Which means we now have an inheritance. Scripture tells us that we can sit at his table, our name is written in his book, his spirit lives in us. We are his heirs. Isn't that amazing?

Just think about that for a moment. So let me ask you again. Are you living out of your circumstance or are you living out of your inheritance? If that isn't enough for you to comprehend, let me take this one step further.

*Romans 8:17*

*Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

We are heirs of God, yes, but we are co-heirs with Christ. That means that whatever Christ receives, we are given as well. Being a co-heir with Christ means that we share in his inheritance, all that is given to Jesus is available to us as well. Love, joy, peace, hope, power, strength, compassion, faith. What Christ receives, we can receive too. Who Jesus is, we can be too. That is our inheritance.

Some of you may be sitting here today thinking but Paul, I fall short of those qualities many times. Why do I feel so disconnected from the way that bible says I am?

Well there might be two reasons why you feel disconnected.

1. You just didn't know you had an inheritance

Maybe no one has ever told you about it before or maybe you have just forgotten.

My maternal grandma was a lovely, kind lady. She was friendly to everyone. Many years ago, she was travelling by train, probably between Stratford and Toronto as she did often in those days, when she struck up a conversation with a lady named Rose that was seated close to her. Just before they went their separate ways, they exchanged addresses and phone numbers and for few years after their initial meeting, they corresponded through letters and phone calls. But it kind of trailed off and life went on. A few years before my grandma died in 1991, she received an official legal letter in the mail, notifying her that Rose had passed away and that my grandma had been written into her will. It caught her completely by surprise. In fact, she had to search her memory to even remember who this woman was and she certainly had no clue that she had this inheritance coming to her.

In the same way, maybe no one has ever told you about the inheritance you have as a member of God's family.

Maybe no one has ever told you that the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. The power of God at work in your life can conquer anything the evil one sends your way. Has anyone ever told you that before?

Can I share a pet peeve of mine? I grew up in an era in the Christian church where many preacher's sermons were focused almost entirely on Hellfire and brimstone. Have you heard this expression? Many of my generation accepted Jesus and became Christians out of fear. Fear that if we didn't, we would go to hell. Which is good. Staying out of hell is good, but that kind of message leaves out a whole bunch of the good news of Jesus. Like the inheritance we have in the family of God. What is given to Christ is given to us. We have the power of the Holy Spirit in us. Do you understand what that means?

The same power that created the heavens and earth, lives in us. The same power that resurrected Jesus from the grave lives in us and it can lead us into a new day, a better tomorrow. Do you understand that? It can help us overcome the temporary setbacks of life. That is the power that is available to us when we tap into it. It enables us to withstand anything that the world throws our way. Things like suffering, persecution, pain, loss and grief. We don't have to go it alone. We have an inheritance. God offers it to us. Have you received it? If not, why not? You are not going to just leave it sitting there are you? Would you do that with any other inheritance?

Maybe the second reason why you feel so disconnected from who the bible says that you are is because you simply don't believe it.

2. You don't believe in our inheritance.

Do you know that Moses could have led the Israelite people into the Promised Land 40 years earlier than Joshua did?

*Joshua 1:3 or page 89*

*God says to Joshua, I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.*

God tells Joshua, I told Moses this same thing, 40 years ago. But those people didn't believe me. They didn't have the faith. Joshua believed and he led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Did they have to cross the raging Jordan River to get there? Yes, they did. Were the giant, barbaric people still living in the land? Yes, they were. Were there many towns to conquer? Yes, there was. Did the people still encounter their share of troubles and disappointments? They certainly did. But they believed. They stepped out of their circumstances and into their inheritance. And they witnessed God do many miracles. He took them out of a life of sin and into a life of redemption and hope. He led them into a brand new day.

God has offered you an inheritance. Have you received it? You don't have to wait until you die to really savor it. It is available right here and right now, eternal life in Him. What is holding you back? Don't say you have never been told because today I told you. So, the question really is, do you believe it?

Maybe you have a raging Jordan River like flood of guilt and shame that is preventing you from moving forward. Or maybe you have other giant obstacles in your life that are impeding your faith, things like fear, anger, bitterness, worry, anxiety or lack of self-worth. Can I remind you of some promises of God in the bible?

*Rom. 8:1*

*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,*

*Phil. 4:6*

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

*Isaiah 40:29*

*he gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.*

*Joshua 1:5*

*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*

These are the promises of God that we can bank on, put our trust in. They propel us to move from living in our circumstance to living in our inheritance. But we can lose sight of it at times and we do need to be reminded of what God has given us.

Last weekend, Carolyn and I were in Waterloo celebrating the 50th anniversary of our former church. It was a wonderful time. Seeing old friends, praising God for the amazing things he has done throughout the history of that church. But it was also two days, Saturday and Sunday packed full of activities. And for someone like me who loves people but also needs alone time to re-energize, I was running on empty by Sunday afternoon. I also knew that I wanted to get back to London by early evening to get some reading done for a course I am taking. Carolyn and I still wanted to have lunch with my daughter and son-in-law who live in Waterloo and then we needed to drop in to see Carolyn's father who had just been placed in a Long Term Care facility. In my mind, I am projecting how long each of these would take until I was finally home alone with my book. One last detail, we also had to bring Carolyn's dad's car back to London as he can no longer drive it. So, we arrived at the restaurant for lunch with my daughter and son-in-law in two separate cars. We have a wonderful meal (although the service did set me back about ten minutes in my self-imposed timeline) but no problem, we could make it up.

As we paid the bill, Carolyn reached for the keys for her father's car, but they are not in her purse. She checks her pockets. We all check the floor. Nothing. We go out to the car and sure enough, the keys are inside and the doors are locked. Deep breath. Good news. There is an extra set at her dad's house, but that means going backwards, we have to go back to

his house, ten minutes to retrieve them. My cheeks begin to flush. A bead of sweat breaks appears on my brow. It as a quiet drive back to get the spare keys. We return to car and then make our way to the long term care facility to see her dad. We arrive at 4:30, I know that they serve dinner at 5:00pm. Carolyn's dad won't want to miss dinner. We have time for a short visit and then we can be on our way. My plan may still work out. Sure enough at 5:00, the dinner bell rings. I scoop Carolyn's dad into his wheelchair and off we go. Wheeling him to his table in the dining room. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. But as we are wheeling past a table, an elderly woman reaches out her hand to stop our progress. Move it or lose it lady, I thought. It turns out this woman, also a resident of this facility, knew Carolyn's family from the church she grew up in and was one of Carolyn's early Sunday School teacher's so of course, that meant .... a conversation!

After what seemed like an eternity, we were on our way again. Down the aisle to Carolyn's dad's assigned seating where of course, we had to meet the three other residents at his table and hear the entire thought process of what each one of them was ordering for dinner. Once Carolyn's dad had placed his order, we were now ready to say our good byes and out we walked. As I made my way to the front door I turned to say something to Carolyn, but she is not behind me. In fact, as I scanned the lobby, she was nowhere. And that is when I think I muttered a bad word. I think I did, not sure but I at least thought a bad word, because I knew exactly where she was. I made my way back into the dining area and there she was kneeling at the side of that dear woman who had stopped us on our way in.

Laughing with her and caressing her arm and that is when it struck me. Like the Grinch that Stole Christmas, my heart grew four times in that moment. The Holy Spirit that has sealed me, spoke to me in that moment and said, what are you doing, Paul? Your wife, Carolyn has chosen the better way. She is not living in her circumstance, frazzled

and hurried by a self-imposed schedule, driven by time at the expense of taking a moment to talk to a lonely old woman. She is living in her inheritance. Loving those that I have brought her way, even if it is a little unexpected, and a little inconvenient.

That was a huge lesson for me this week. Those times when I too, can get to preoccupied with my circumstance and forget about my inheritance, the life and promises I have as a child of God.

You are not a normal person. I know people have been telling you that for years but it is true. We are not normal. There is something different about us. We are like Jesus and the same power that lived in him, lives in us. The Holy Spirit. We are sons and daughters of the living God, heirs of his kingdom. Co-heirs with Christ. We need to stop listening to voices that tell us anything different. We have an inheritance.

So, are you living in this inheritance or are your living in your circumstance? That doesn't mean we won't have trouble but, it does mean that we will have more victories than defeats. We will have more courage than fear and more hope than despair. And a more vibrant and meaningful way to live, than spending most of our days, wandering around in circles in a desert.

AMEN? AMEN

Let's Pray.

## **Points to Ponder**

### **THE STORY**

#### **The Battle Begins**

##### **Chapter 7**

**With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.**

1. Have you ever received an inheritance of money, a possession or a physical trait? Share some of your experiences as an heir of these inheritances.
2. What is the “land” that you feel God is giving to you these days? What is stopping you from entering it?
3. Can you think of a time in your life when you felt like the Israelites, just wandering in circles? Describe that situation and what it was that finally propelled you to break free and move ahead.
4. Talk about what it means to “live in your circumstance rather than live in your inheritance’. Reflect on some situations in your life now where you are living in the circumstance or where you are living in your inheritance.
5. The power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us, as followers of Jesus. How does that give you hope in your day to day life?

#### **Prayer and Action Item**

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray for those who have specifically stated that they are struggling between living in their circumstance and living in their inheritance.