



Guidelines for ION network feedback

Each SYNC icon above represents one theme in the biblical story. Each icon is fleshed out below in a two-page gospel summary where the icon's theme is the dominant one that integrates all the others.

Your challenge, if you choose to accept it, is to read all seven versions and, based on your experience in your setting, start a discussion with us about two things:

1. Which one or two are best suited for your setting?
2. How might you tweak them to fit even better?

We at SYNCx.org look forward to discussing your situation with you. We never get tired of talking about the good news with people who are trying to spread it!

We hope that commenting on these materials will inspire and encourage you in whatever you are already doing to spread the gospel and build up new believers, leading to more transformation of lives and societies, more glory to God, and less pain in the world.

[Additional background information on what is driving this experiment](#)

[E-mail your questions and/or feedback here](#)

(or send to stonedovefisher@gmail.com)

The Seven Versions of “The Rescuer” story

by Stan Nussbaum

All seven versions as of August 6, 2018. These are under ongoing revision. There will not be any “final” or “authoritative” copy.

If you ask your friend what a movie was about, you will get a 30-60 second summary of a two-hour movie. That is what “The Rescuer” stories are—the Bible and the gospel in a page and a half. All seven contain the same seven themes in the same order (creation, Abraham (& OT), Christ, Pentecost, mercy, persecution, and Second Coming), but a different theme is dominant in each one.

THE SEVEN VERSIONS	Emphasis and probable context of use
1. A Matter of Life or Death	Creation – affirmation of life, joy, food, music, children, etc.
2. Uprooted	Roots in Abraham – where people are either rootless or too deeply rooted in their ethnicity
3. The Freedom King	Freedom (Passover, cross, resurrection) – for oppressed people or where people see God as a restrictor instead of a liberator
4. The Mother of All Power Struggles	Power of the Spirit – in power/fear cultures or in any setting where a person feels helpless
5. Unforgivable	Forgiveness – in guilt/forgiveness cultures
6. Having What It Takes	Carrying our cross – in honor/shame cultures and persecution situations, or as an anti-dote to the Prosperity Gospel
7. Best Vision Ever	Christ’s return – where people have no hope or their hope is in the wrong place

Please note: The seven versions above do not build on each other like chapters in a book. You may read just one or start anywhere and read in any order.

The stories serve three purposes, depending how and where you use them:

- Give recent converts the big picture of Scripture as a framework for life transformation
- Clarify the gospel and “Christianity” for curious or confused non-believers
- Help long-time superficial converts realize what the transforming gospel really is

Each version of “The Rescuer” is two pages long. In all versions, the body of the story is 1 ½ pages, followed by a ½ page “Epilogue” that gives the implications for those who already are saying “I’m in,” and for those who have not yet said that. The implications are spelled out in five “yes” affirmations covering the same five topics in the same order but worded differently in each version.

The final paragraph of each epilogue is framed around Jesus’ declaration of the good news, using the same declaration wording as was used in the body of that version of the story. Those who are not yet believers are then invited to ask questions about the story or the affirmations in the epilogue.

OFFICIAL PERMISSION TO CUSTOMIZE THE STORY: Believe it or not, you are free to make edits to any or all of these stories, creating your own version. You may smooth out any rough spots or strengthen any weak spots and use your version as you wish. If you send us a copy of your changes or a link to your finished product, that will be appreciated but is not required. Serve the Lord, not us.

A Matter of Life and Death (version 1 of “The Rescuer”)

Stan Nussbaum

Note: There are seven versions of “The Rescuer” story, one for each SYNC season (See Yourself iN Christ). This is the “Life Season” version. For details see <http://www.syncx.org>.



God, the Real GOD, creates a beautiful world with life everywhere, but people are tricked into thinking he is still withholding something from them so they take and try for themselves the one thing he warned was poisonous. Sure enough, death gets loose and the world gets ugly with shame, violence, abuse, and funerals.

But God does not give up. He takes things to a new level. Through Abraham, he creates a whole God-tribe to show all the other tribes the key to life. All they have to do is trust God more than they trust their own judgment and their own desires.

Down through the centuries, we see a whole string of rescue stories for Abraham and his descendants like Joseph, Moses, David, Elijah, and Esther. God saves their lives when they trust him. Things do not go so well for those who trust their own judgment, but I’m not going into all those details right now.

During the ups and downs of Abraham’s descendants, God keeps sending prophets with one main message—sometime, somehow, the Real GOD will send the ultimate Rescuer, the King of Life, the most important descendant of Abraham ever.

This is Jesus, the “Messiah,” the one-of-a-kind God-person. God sends him to earth through Mary, and it’s perfect. Even his name means, “The Real GOD rescues.”

He tells the whole nation descended from Abraham, “This is it! God is bringing heaven’s life to earth now! Follow me and see what I mean.” Many are thrilled to follow him but the leaders think he is a fake, and things get very dangerous for him. He sees death coming, and he has to decide whether he will trust God’s judgment and accept death or trust his own judgment and look for a way out.

He trusts God but he gets arrested and executed on a cross anyway! What is happening? Where is his rescuer?

But here is the best part of the story—God the Father rescues him out of the grave, body and all. For 40 days Jesus keeps showing up alive and explaining what is going on. Then the Father takes him to heaven and installs him as King of the universe. It’s like God is saying, “This is how I treat people who totally trust me.”

And do you know the first thing Jesus does as King? He sends his Spirit, life, and power down into his followers, giving them all a role in blessing the world. Jesus sends them out, radiating life, showing and telling that he really is the Messiah, the key to forgiveness and life for everybody everywhere including right here right now.

Not all these messengers are physical descendants of Abraham, but they all become his spiritual descendants. It is like they have been born all over again, this time with the “Abraham gene.” Now they can trust God more than their own judgment.

Some people eagerly ask for that gene, and they get it. Others can’t bring themselves to trust God quite that far. Some even see Jesus as a threat to life as they know it. They try to shut the messengers up, but it doesn’t work. The messengers are able to show the same mercy and courage Jesus showed when he was tortured. His life keeps bubbling up inside them no matter what.

That’s how things stand for the time being, but when the set time comes, the Rescuer will come back to earth in person to destroy death and reconnect the whole world to God’s life once and for all. So that’s our story. That’s why we live the way we live and bless everybody we can bless. As Abraham’s heirs and Jesus’ messengers, we are life-bringers, sneak previews of a world of life and peace.

Epilogue

If you have already said, “I’m in! Give me that Abraham gene and SYNC me with the Rescuer,” Jesus Christ has already rescued you from death and turned you into an agent of his Life. So let’s get the party started, celebrating with a huge “Yes” to all five of these things:

1. **Yes**, God is proactively bringing heaven’s life to earth. He isn’t just keeping score and reacting to what we do.
2. **Yes**, God’s whole life-giving plan revolves around Jesus, the Rescuer who makes earth more like heaven and less like hell.
3. **Yes**, Jesus has put his Spirit, life, and power into me, plugging me into the God-movement that goes all the way back to Abraham.
4. **Yes**, I am taking my first life-giving step by the Spirit’s power—forgiving everybody for everything like Jesus has forgiven me.
5. **Yes**, I realize I may be rejected, threatened, or attacked by people who don’t want the life I am bringing, but I am trusting Jesus and his Spirit to get me through the pain.

If you have not yet said “I’m in. SYNC me!” what else would you like to discuss about this story before you would say “yes” to these things?

Jesus won’t force you in, but once you say yes, he brings you in. He moves into your life, frees you from the death-grip of evil, and sends you out as part of the life-giving plan that started with Abraham. That is what the rest of your life will be about—finding out what Jesus meant by “**God is bringing heaven’s life to earth now.**”

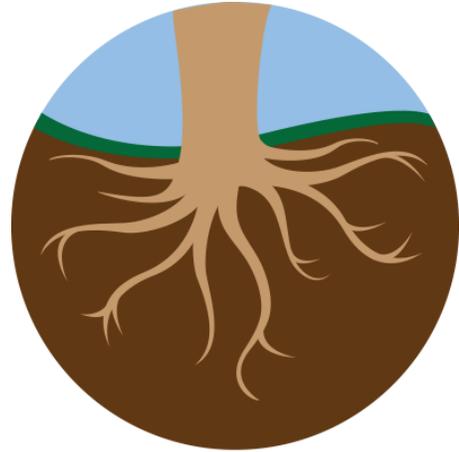
You won’t get to run your own life or build your own kingdom any more, but you will be more alive and better SYNCed than you have ever been, and you will bring life to your world.

Uprooted (version 2 of "The Rescuer")

Stan Nussbaum

Note: There are seven versions of "The Rescuer" story, one for each SYNC season (See Yourself iN Christ). This is the "Roots Season" version. For details see <http://www.syncx.org>.

God, the Real GOD, creates a beautiful world, perfectly inter-connected and peaceful. He walks and talks with the first humans, Adam and Eve. He puts everything at their fingertips. They just pick and eat.



But wouldn't you know it, they sneakily try the fruit of the only tree he said not to eat from. They do not trust God enough to know what is good for them. Shamed and uprooted from their paradise, they discover labor, pain, and fear.

Centuries go by, and things keep falling apart. Humans cannot re-root themselves in God or recover the kind of life they had. So God steps in. He chooses a man named Abraham to be the new root of a new nation.

The first thing God does to Abraham is to uproot him! He tells him to leave his homeland and go to a land that will be the inheritance of the nation that will come from him, and Abraham does it even though he is already old and has no children. He believes God's promise that he will have descendants as uncountable as "sand on the seashore," and they will be the key to bringing God's blessing to the whole world.

Over the centuries, it gradually comes true. Abraham's grandson Jacob has twelve sons, and each becomes the father of an entire clan. God roots the new nation in the region he had promised Abraham, and he gives them one command above all others:
"No fake gods. I am the Real GOD, the God of Abraham, and you are mine."

They promise to stay true to their roots in Abraham but they soon start worshiping the fake gods along with the Real GOD. He warns them through his prophets, but they don't listen. Without God's protection, they get uprooted again and transplanted into a foreign land, Babylon.

But this is not the end. Besides warning the nation, the prophets also predicted that someday a Rescuer would be born, a descendant of Abraham and of King David. Like them, he would never worship the fake gods. He would perfectly, permanently re-root the nation and the world in God.

Centuries later that prophecy comes true. Jesus is born, a descendant of Abraham. He does not directly declare that he is the long-awaited king or messiah, but he keeps talking like it—"This is it! God is reconnecting with earth, setting up his kingdom to deliver his blessings. Follow me and see what I mean."

The authorities of the nation, also descendants of Abraham, decide that Jesus is a fake messiah, and they get the Roman governor to execute him. But the Real GOD proves Jesus is the real Messiah by bringing him back to life.

Here is the shocker. Jesus' death changes the line of descent from Abraham. From then on, people who are blood descendants of Abraham lose their connection with the promises God gave Abraham for as long as they think Jesus is a fake. All those who accept Jesus as the genuine king are grafted into Abraham's heritage. It does not matter whether they are blood descendants of Abraham or not. All is forgiven. They receive the Spirit of Jesus, like a new DNA, a new "bloodline".

These spiritual descendants of Abraham keep getting attacked by people who are furious about what they say Jesus is doing and how he is doing it. Nevertheless, they show mercy to their attackers, following Jesus' instructions and example at any price. They know their mission is to bless the world.

Why are they so confident? Roots! Through Jesus they are connected all the way back to their spiritual forefather Abraham. Jesus also connects them forward, all the way to the end of the world, when he will come back to earth in person to assert himself as King and crush all evil.

So that's our story. That's why we live the way we live and tell this story so gladly. As Abraham's heirs and Jesus' messengers, we spread the news that can turn anyone who trusts Jesus into a descendant of Abraham, a participant in God's 4000-year-old strategy to bless the world.

Epilogue

If you have already said, "I'm in. SYNC me!" you have your roots in Abraham. You have his spiritual DNA. So let's get the party started, celebrating with a huge "Yes" to all five of these things:

1. Yes, God has provided a new spiritual root to unite and bless humanity, and it all goes back to Abraham.
2. Yes, the key to God's whole strategy is Jesus, the King of blessing, whose wrongful death ironically created a way for people like us to become spiritual descendants of Abraham.
3. Yes, Jesus puts his Spirit, life, and power into us, rooting us in Abraham and giving us a share in the mission of Abraham's tribe—blessing the whole world.
4. Yes, I am blessing others right now—forgiving everybody for everything like Jesus has forgiven me. My roots give me strength to trust God about that.
5. Yes, I am trusting Jesus and his Spirit to help me rise above any rejection I face for him. I know my roots in Abraham. I know I am one of the many citizens of Jesus' kingdom.

If you have not yet said, "I'm in. SYNC me!" what else would you like to discuss about this story before you would say yes to these things?

Jesus won't force you in, but once you say yes, he brings you in. He roots you in Abraham spiritually, so you trust God like Abraham did. That is what the rest of your life will be about—finding out what Jesus meant when he said, "God is setting up his kingdom to deliver his blessings!"

You won't get to run your own life or build your own kingdom any more, but you will be rooted in God's kingdom, and you will never have to wonder about your identity or purpose again.

The Freedom King (version 3 of "The Rescuer")

Stan Nussbaum

Note: There are seven versions of "The Rescuer" story, one for each SYNC season (See Yourself iN Christ). This is the "Freedom Season" version. For details see <http://www.syncx.org>.



God, the Real GOD, creates a beautiful world with life everywhere. He gives the first humans, Adam and Eve, freedom to enjoy it all, except for the fruit of one tree.

An enemy of God cons them into thinking they should be free to eat it, and they do. Instantly they lose their freedom—freedom to hold their heads high, to enjoy life without working, to give birth without pain, to live forever, and to have face-to-face visits with God. From there things go downhill for generations—each generation seeking to regain freedom, none able to find it.

So starting with Abraham, God launches his own freedom restoration plan. Abraham's descendants, the Freedom Tribe, will bless the world with the freedom known by people who trust God like Abraham did. Sorry to say, the Freedom Tribe soon gets enslaved and oppressed in Egypt. They can't free anybody, even themselves.

So God frees them his way. Through Moses he sends so many plagues on Egypt that the ruler finally decides the whole Freedom Tribe is a curse. He frees them just to get rid of them.

God gives them victory over other tribes that were living in the land of their destiny, polluting it with vile customs like child sacrifice. For centuries the Freedom Tribe lives there, but their trust in God does not last. They are carried off as captives to Babylon, and God has to free them again, bringing them back to their land after 70 years.

Do you know what keeps them going through all their ups and downs? Their prophets who tell them that one day God will send the Freedom King, the "Messiah," to deliver them. He will be a descendant of their most famous king, David, and he will be born in David's hometown, Bethlehem.

In God's time, it finally happens. The Messiah, Jesus, arrives and issues a daring proclamation: "This is it! God is setting us free now! Follow me and see what I mean."

Many people assume he is hinting at starting a revolution against the Roman Empire, which ruled over the Freedom Tribe at that time. The crowds love him, but the leaders do not trust him. They arrange with the Roman governor to have him executed for blasphemy and treason.

Instead of rallying his many followers to rescue him, Jesus sacrifices his freedom to win ours. And, oh, how he wins it! His death as a willing sacrifice frees us from our sin debt to God, and on the third day, God frees him from his tomb!

Then Jesus takes his freedom mission to a new level. He shows himself alive and well several times before ascending to take his throne in heaven as the Freedom King. Soon he sends his Spirit down into his followers, empowering them to spread his freedom and mercy all over the world.

Some people welcome their freedom message, but others, often the powerful people, keep interfering and arresting them. It has been the same ever since, but the freedom messengers do not give up or shut up. They are able to show the mercy and courage of Jesus because his Spirit lives in them.

They also know the secret. Unannounced, the Freedom King will suddenly come back to earth in person to complete the freedom mission. Evil is doomed.

So that's our story. That's why we live the way we live and tell this story to anybody who will listen. As Abraham's heirs and Jesus' messengers, we spread Christ's freedom and show people what a free life is.

Epilogue

If you have already said, "I'm in. SYNC me! Sign me up for the Freedom Tribe," Jesus Christ has set you free from all kinds of things and turned you into an agent of freedom. So let's get the party started, celebrating with a huge "Yes" to all five of these things:

1. **Yes**, God is the great promoter of human freedom, not the great restrictor. He is proactively working his freedom restoration plan.
2. **Yes**, God's whole plan revolves around Jesus, who declared freedom and sent all his followers to keep declaring it and showing what it looks like.
3. **Yes**, Jesus puts his Spirit, life, and power into us, plugging us into the freedom mission and the Freedom Tribe that goes all the way back to Abraham.
4. **Yes**, I am a freedom agent—setting people free from their obligation to pay for what they did to me. I am freeing them just like Jesus has freed me.
5. **Yes**, I will trust Jesus and his Spirit to get me through any loss of freedom I may suffer because powerful people don't want to hear the Freedom Declaration.

If you have not yet said, "I'm in. SYNC me!" what else would you like to discuss about this story before you would say yes to these things?

Jesus won't force you in, but once you say yes, he brings you in. He makes you a free person and gives you a role in his freedom restoration plan. That is what the rest of your life will be about—finding out what Jesus meant when he said, "**God is setting us free now!**" You won't get to run your own life or build your own kingdom any more, but you will be both freer and better connected than you have ever been, and you will know why the name Jesus means, "The Real GOD sets free."

The Mother of All Power Struggles (version 4 of "The Rescuer")

Stan Nussbaum

Note: There are seven versions of "The Rescuer" story, one for each SYNC season (See Yourself iN Christ). This is the "Power Season" version. For details see <http://www.syncx.org>.

God, the Real GOD, creates a beautiful world with life everywhere. He gives the first humans, Adam and Eve, power to rule it all, except for one tree he declares off limits.

An enemy of God cons them into believing God made this rule in order to keep some secret knowledge and power from them.

As soon as they fall for this lie, they realize their mistake, but the damage is done. Their power is broken, and human life becomes one huge power struggle.

God launches his own plan to reconnect humans to his power and to end all human power struggles and abuses. He does not launch his plan through a powerful empire like ancient Egypt or Assyria. He does it through Abraham and Sarah, an elderly couple who had no children. By his power for good, he miraculously gives them a son, whose descendants become a whole nation of twelve tribes.

God connects his own name, his reputation, and his power to this nation in a special way. When the nation trusts him and honors him, it is rescued and it thrives even if defeat looks certain from a human point of view. When it relies on its own power or seeks power from other gods or allies, it falls even if it seems it should succeed.

God sends prophets to promise the nation that its ups and downs will not go on forever. Someday a special king, a descendant of the great King David, will rise and rule the entire world with justice and peace forever. His power will have no limits.

The nation waits for hundreds of years for this promise to come true, and then one day, a man born in King David's home town and in his family line gets their hopes up. He declares a shocking message nationwide: "God's ancient plan is coming true in our time! God himself is taking power now. Follow me and see what I mean."

He shows God's power by healing sick people, driving out demons, multiplying food, and doing many things that human power cannot do. Everything he teaches is about God's power arriving on earth. He even empowers his followers to do the things he is doing.

One day he goes into the Temple in Jerusalem and starts acting like he is in charge, ordering the price-gouging officials to clear out. That pushes the authorities too far. They assert their power to arrest, try, and condemn him a few days later. They write his name and his crime on his cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." He dies there, seemingly powerless.

But the rulers who kill him have no idea what power they are fighting against. God raises the executed "criminal" back to life! It proves that God is in control and they are not. He can undo anything they do.

For forty days Jesus shows his followers that he is alive again, but he does not appear to anyone else. He does not strike his enemies dead. He does not strong-arm anyone into believing he is the Rescuer, the Messiah, the rightful heir to David's throne. Then, without dying again, he returns to heaven to take power.



His first act from his throne as King of the Universe is to send his Spirit down into his followers, putting his power for good into them and authorizing them to be his ambassadors on earth. They get to tell people they saw him alive. They get to show his power to heal the sick, and they point people to him and his mercy.

Some people welcome Jesus' powerful representatives; others fight them, especially power holders who feel threatened by them. But the messengers keep working courageously anyway. They know who they are and they know what their mission is. It is not to take over and rule. Their "power" is only the power to point everyone to the King, calling them all to enter his kingdom and welcome his transforming power.

They also know that at the set time the King will come back visibly to break the power of his enemies once and for all. He will publicly assert his power, and no one will get away with anything ever again.

And that's why we don't grab for power or abuse it today. That is not what ambassadors do. As Abraham's heirs and Jesus' messengers, our job is to declare that Jesus is giving power back to the people, that is, he has defeated the evil powers and authorized us to go on defeating evil in his name until he returns to finish the work in person.

That's our story. That's why we live the way we live and tell this story to anybody who will listen.

Epilogue

If you have already said, "I'm in! SYNC me!" Jesus Christ has put his Holy Spirit into you, giving you all the power and authority you need to make the difference he wants you to make in the world. (2 Pt. 1.3) So let's get the party started, celebrating with a huge "Yes" to all five of these things:

1. **Yes**, God is the ultimate power holder and he has everything under his control and on schedule. All other power holders are temporary until he decides their time is up.
2. **Yes**, God's whole plan revolves around Jesus, who willingly laid aside his power and sacrificed himself in order to carry out his mission. He warned his followers they would have to do the same.
3. **Yes**, Jesus has put his Spirit, life, and power for good into me, making me a citizen of his kingdom and a member of his team of ambassadors on earth.
4. **Yes**, I keep doing the most basic thing the Spirit empowers me to do—forgiving others for everything like Jesus has forgiven me. I will not allow vengeance to block the power flow through me.
5. **Yes**, I will trust Jesus and his Spirit to give me power to endure whatever I may have to suffer as an ambassador of the King.

If you have not yet said, "I'm in! SYNC me!" what else would you like to discuss before you would say "yes" to these things?

Jesus won't force you in, but once you say yes, he brings you in. He moves into your life, and you become part of the God-powered restoration plan that started with Abraham. That is what the rest of your life will be about—finding out what Jesus meant when he said, "**God himself is taking power now!**"

You won't get to build your own kingdom anymore or brag about any position of power that God assigns you to, but you will live with the power of the Holy Spirit in and around you, connecting you with his plan and his people. It doesn't get any better than that.

Unforgivable (version 5 of “The Rescuer”)

by Stan Nussbaum

Note: There are seven versions of “The Rescuer” story, one for each SYNC season (See Yourself iN Christ). This is the “Mercy Season” version. For details see <http://www.syncx.org>.



God, the Real GOD, creates a beautiful world with life everywhere. There is only one rule people have to obey in order to keep everything working, and they get duped into breaking it! God punishes them but they don't learn their lesson. Their sons are no better and one ends up killing the other. Things get so corrupt and violent that God destroys all but eight humans in the Great Flood, but not even those eight learn their lesson.

There has to be a better way for people to learn how to live in God's world, and so God provides one. We see it in the story of Joseph, who gets sold into slavery by his eleven jealous brothers. Years later Joseph gets a golden opportunity to kill them all, but he has mercy on them. He even provides for them and their families!

That event sets the tone for the whole incredible story of God's mercy coming into the world through the “God Tribe” descended from Joseph's great-grandfather, Abraham. God later sets up an entire forgiveness system of sacrifices and priests through Moses and Aaron. When the tribe abuses the system, God punishes them but never wipes them out.

Centuries later, the story of God's mercy comes to a climax. God sends Jesus, the “Messiah,” the one-of-a-kind God-person, to earth through Mary, and it's perfect. Even his name means, “The Real GOD rescues.” Jesus spreads the declaration: “Good news! God's mercy is arriving. God's deliverance is here. Welcome it, and follow me!” And can you believe it—the authorities get him executed!!

That has to be unforgivable, right? They have Jesus' blood on their hands. But there is a twist in the story here. God declares that the senseless, wicked execution of Jesus will be the very thing he uses to reveal how deep his mercy goes!

Instead of paying them back, God raises Jesus to life so he can serve as the agent of mercy for humanity. Then Jesus presents his own blood to God as the perfect, final sacrifice! He declares not Judgment Day but a grace period, and he starts adopting foreigners who accept this incredible mercy into the “God Tribe.”

The God Tribe becomes the Mercy Tribe, a huge global task force to spread the news of his mercy during the grace period. He gives them all his Holy Spirit so they receive the power to show mercy like he did and the grit to endure like he did.

You would think that the whole world would welcome Jesus' messengers of mercy with open arms, and while some do, many are mystified or insulted with the whole idea that they need mercy at all.

Some would like to receive mercy but don't want to be merciful to others, and Jesus does not allow that. Some of them try everything to silence the messengers.

That's how things stand for the time being, but it will all change whenever the grace period runs out. No mercy then. Jesus, the Rescuer, will come back to earth in person to rescue the forgiven people from those who refused to accept Jesus' forgiveness and let his mercy transform them. Evil will be destroyed not forgiven, and all the mercy-lovers will live in gratitude forever, basking in the glory of God with no evil to spoil it.

And that's why we show mercy like we do today. As Abraham's heirs and Jesus' messengers, we are mercy agents during the grace period. We are sneak previews of a grateful, glorious world without revenge.

That's our story. That's why we live the way we live and tell this story to anybody who will listen.

Epilogue

If you have already said, "I'm in! SYNC me!" Jesus Christ has already opened the door of mercy for you, and you have already walked through it. So let's get the party started, celebrating with a huge "Yes" to all five of these things:

1. **Yes**, God is proactively rescuing the human race. He isn't angrily keeping score and reacting to what we do.
2. **Yes**, God's whole plan revolves around Jesus, the Rescuer who shows us what mercy looks like and what it costs.
3. **Yes**, Jesus has put his Spirit, life, and power into me, plugging me into the Forgiveness Tribe that goes all the way back to Abraham.
4. **Yes**, I am doing what Tribe members do—showing mercy to others whether they deserve it or not. I can afford to do that now that Christ has shown mercy to me.
5. **Yes**, I will trust Jesus and his Spirit to get me through any suffering that comes from those who set themselves up against his message of mercy.

If you have not yet said, "I'm in! SYNC me!" what else would you like to discuss before you would say "yes" to these things?

Jesus won't force you in, but once you say yes, he brings you in. He moves into your life and you become part of the rescue plan that started with Abraham. That is what the rest of your life will be about—finding out what Jesus meant when he said, **"Good news! God's mercy is arriving. God's deliverance is here."**

You won't get to run your own life or take revenge anymore, but you will be more alive and better SYNCed than you have ever been, and you will never again think of the Real GOD as judgmental.

Having What It Takes (version 6 of “The Rescuer”)

Stan Nussbaum

Note: There are seven versions of “The Rescuer” story, one for each SYNC season (See Yourself iN Christ). This is the “Courage Season” version. For details see <http://www.syncx.org>.



God, the Real GOD, creates a beautiful world with life everywhere. The first humans have absolutely nothing to be afraid of except God’s one dire warning: “Don’t eat from that one poisonous tree.”

An enemy of God tells them that God did not give that command for their good, and they do not have what it takes to see through that lie. They eat the fruit and pay the price. Their beautiful world becomes a scary world—corrupt, violent, and deadly.

The human race keeps proving we do not have what it takes to undo the mess Adam and Eve created, so God launches his own plan to show that it only takes one thing to fix everything. That one thing is to trust God, having the courage to do what he says even when it does not look right or feel safe to you. You also need the grit to get through the consequences.

Abraham has that kind of trust. When God tells him to leave the security of his homeland and emigrate to an unfamiliar land, he does it. When God promises that this will become the homeland of a new nation that will descend from him, Abraham believes him. He even is willing to obey God’s command to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah, but at the last second God provides a ram to sacrifice instead.

Like Abraham, many of his descendants trust the Real GOD. Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel, and Esther all take incredible risks, believing that God will get them through, and he does. Others like Jeremiah come close to dying in prison because they took the risk of speaking the painful truth to the king, but God gives him what it takes to endure the pressure without cracking.

Centuries later, Jesus takes trust in God to a whole new level. He declares that God’s reign on earth is beginning, and he calls his whole nation to “follow him” even though he knows this will sound like he is starting a revolutionary movement. He gets arrested, and his followers all run away to save their own skins, but still he is not intimidated. He gets tortured but he still forgives.

He keeps trusting God, showing the courage and grit of a true hero, and where does it get him? Nowhere! He is executed, and there is no lasting impact from anything he did or taught. End of story.

But wait. On the third day, God the Father brings his son, Jesus, out of the grave! God comes through again; the ultimate proof that he rewards his courageous followers who have what it takes to stick with the mission he gives them.

When they see Jesus alive again, his spineless followers are transformed into loyal, courageous messengers. After he rises to heaven to take the throne, Jesus sends his Holy Spirit down to live in them, giving them what it takes to face arrest, beating, jail, and even execution.

Their grit is powerfully attractive, and the Jesus movement keeps growing. It is still growing today, illegally in many parts of the world. And it will keep growing until the set day when the risen Jesus comes back in person to show everybody, including us right here, that his messengers were telling the truth all along. They had every reason to stick with their mission no matter what.

And that's why we have what it takes to live the way we live and tell this story everywhere. As Abraham's heirs and Jesus' messengers, we trust God for the courage to carry out our mission and the grit to endure for the long haul. That's our story.

Epilogue

If you have already said, "I'm in! SYNC me!" Jesus has already put his Spirit into you. Now you have what it takes to endure to the end. So let's get the party started, celebrating with a huge "Yes" to all five of these things:

1. **Yes**, God can be trusted 100% of the time whether we have obvious victories like Abraham and Moses or suffering like Jeremiah and Jesus.
2. **Yes**, God's whole plan revolves around the heroic courage and grit of Jesus to face the cross and death. He calls us to trust him as sacrificially as he trusted God, his Father.
3. **Yes**, Jesus has put his Spirit into me to overpower my fears and give me the strength it takes to trust God no matter what.
4. **Yes**, I am living dangerously—forgiving everybody for everything like Jesus has forgiven me, and trusting God to work out the implications of that.
5. **Yes**, I will trust Jesus and his Spirit to give me whatever it takes to endure hard times and unfair attacks as unflinchingly as Jesus did.

If you have not yet said, "I'm in! SYNC me!" what else would you like to discuss before you would say "yes" to these things?

Jesus won't force you in, but once you say yes, he brings you in. He shows you what your God-given mission in life is, and he gives you what it takes to stick with it. His Spirit moves into your life and you become a worthy spiritual descendant of Abraham, the father of trust.

That is what the rest of your life will be about—finding out what Jesus meant when he said, "**Trust me! Follow me!**" You won't get to focus on protecting yourself and your own little kingdom anymore, but you will live more courageously and honorably than you ever could have lived on your own, and no matter what comes, you will have a peace you never imagined possible.

Best Vision Ever (version 7 of “The Rescuer”)

Stan Nussbaum

Note: There are seven versions of “The Rescuer” story, one for each SYNC season (See Yourself iN Christ). This is the “Vision Season” version. For details see <http://www.syncx.org>.

The first humans had it all. There was no way to envision anything more beautiful, pleasant, or satisfying. They even had frequent visits from the Real GOD himself.

We are obviously not living in an ideal world today. I won't go into how things changed so drastically. I'm just saying that today people have many conflicting visions of what the world should be and how to get there. The trouble is that some people will die for their vision, and even kill for it.

This story sketches one of those visions for the world. I call it the best vision ever because it is more than wishing, hoping, and trying to be good. This vision is ancient, it is true, it flexes for all ages and cultures, and its followers may die for it but they will not kill to bring it about.

Picture this vision for the world. It begins 4000 years ago with a man called Abraham, whose wife Sarah is old and childless. In a vision one night, God confirms the incredible promises he had made to Abraham—Sarah will have a son, his descendants will be as uncountable as the stars, God will give them control of a vast area of land, and they will bless every family on earth.

Those promises begin to come true as Abraham's family grows to become a whole nation and gets established in its homeland. God sends prophets like Isaiah who talk of one particular king whom God will send at his chosen time. He will rule the entire world, not just the land of Abraham's nation, and his reign will never end! The nation can't wait for his arrival, but they do have to wait for hundreds of years.

And then out of nowhere God finally moves the vision forward. An angel appears to Mary and tells her she will miraculously become pregnant with the baby who will make the nation's vision come true. That baby, God's son Jesus, grows up to declare: “The ancient vision is coming true now! God's glory is on the rise!” He shows it by healing many people, by teaching brilliantly in ways that ordinary people could understand, and by calling people to follow him and trust him absolutely.

Powerful people see that his vision is to take over everything if they do not stop him. They put him on trial for talking like he is the Messiah, the super-king the prophets envisioned and predicted, and they accuse him of being a liar whose vision will lead his nation to disaster. They sentence him to die on a cross not just to kill him, but to shame him, destroy his reputation, and crush his vision.

But it all backfires. All it does is set the stage for the proof that the Real GOD sent him, and his vision was true. On the third day, God the Father raises him from the grave!

We might expect him to claim his throne on the spot, going back to the court to ask them, “Can you hear me now?” But he does not do that. He returns to his heavenly throne without dying again, but



before he goes he tells his messengers what to do until he comes back to earth to take total control here and destroy evil.

His messengers are supposed to embody the vision, not impose it by force! How can they do that? He sends his Spirit to turn them into a new kind of human being. They receive Jesus' mercy and become merciful, showing that his vision actually works.

We pick up where those followers left off. People who are pushing some other vision for the world do not want any competition from Jesus' vision. Sometimes they trash his vision or try to block us like the powers tried to block Jesus himself, but he lives in us, sticks with us, and gives us the grit it takes to endure as he did.

We know who we are—Abraham's heirs and Jesus' messengers. We already see the vision coming true as he changes us by his Spirit. The future is now! It's a wonderful way to live. We are trailers for the movie the world will see when the Rescuer returns to carry out his vision totally. That's our story.

Epilogue

If you have already said, "I'm in! SYNC me!" then you just heard the story of your vision for the world. You are ready for this vision to come true, so let's get the party started, celebrating with a huge "Yes" to all five of these things:

1. **Yes**, the vision that will save the world is not any human vision but God's vision that he has been proactively and patiently working since the time of Abraham.
2. **Yes**, God's whole vision for the world revolves around Jesus, the king he sent to make the vision come true.
3. **Yes**, Jesus has put his Spirit, life, and power into me, plugging me into the vision and turning me into a different person.
4. **Yes**, I agree not to force the vision on anyone, but to spread it by living it out. I will start now by forgiving others like Jesus has forgiven me.
5. **Yes**, I will trust Jesus and his Spirit to get me through any opposition that comes from people who are pushing other visions for the world.

If you have not yet said, "I'm in! SYNC me!" what else would you like to discuss before you would say "yes" to these things?

Jesus won't force you in, but once you say yes, he brings you in. He moves into your life and you become part of the vision for the world that started with Abraham. That is what the rest of your life will be about—finding out what Jesus meant when he said, **"God's glory is on the rise!"**

You won't get to seek any glory for yourself any more, but you will radiate the glory of Jesus Christ, and by the power of his Spirit you will contribute to the fulfillment of God's vision for the world, the vision that Jesus himself will finish when he returns to earth.

Background information on “The Rescuer” experiment

[E-mail your questions and/or feedback here](#)

(or send to stonedovefisher@gmail.com)

MAIN ASSUMPTION AND AGENDA – WHY THIS IS TIMELY

Many agencies and churches have broadened their understanding of mission from conversion to transformation. This is reflected in the Lausanne Movement’s “Foundational statement” where one of the four parts of the Lausanne vision is “Kingdom impact in every sphere of society.”¹ However, this broader understanding is not yet very widely reflected in the way most evangelicals summarize and present the gospel.

Our gospel summaries need to catch up with our understanding of mission. We need some *fresh summaries of the gospel* that will penetrate deeper, connect better, and lead more naturally to the transformation process that will affect “every sphere of society.”

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Find out whether the “Rescuer” stories are well received enough to deserve further local development and promotion as a foundation for Christian transformation at all levels.

WHAT ARE THE “RESCUER” STORIES THAT ARE BEING TESTED?

These stories are seven overlapping versions of the biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation, each with the gospel woven into it in a different way.

All seven versions of the Rescuer story have the same general aim and approach as many other panoramic narrative explanations of the Bible and the gospel from a variety of sources such as:

- Firm Foundations, “Creation to Christ,” <http://www.fbcva.org/filerequest/7850.pdf>
- God’s Story Project, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGfyz97uEw>
- Rock International, “The King of Glory,” <http://rockintl.org/index.php/rock-resources>
- Answers in Genesis, “The Seven C’s,” <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-history/seven-cs-of-history/>
- Spread Truth, <https://thestoryfilm.com/read>
- The American Vision, <https://americanvision.org/what-is-the-gospel/>
- The Gospel Project, <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/03/30/a-5-minute-video-on-the-big-story-of-the-bible-for-kids/>

The stories in this list focus mostly on the question, “*How does Jesus take care of your sin problem?*” My belief is that when the gospel is presented with this focus, there is very little foundation or incentive for later transformation that goes deep into the person and widely across the society. It is like building the first floor of a building without leaving any steel rebar sticking up to attach the second floor later. It is almost as though no one intends that the second floor be built. Of course, it is still possible to add a second floor, but it is a lot harder than it needs to be.

¹ https://www.lausanne.org/?sfid=27242&sfm_wpcf-groupings=Foundational%20Statements, seen on 16 April 2018

The “Rescuer” stories try to leave some rebar sticking out of the gospel summary so that transformation can be built on easily later. They do this by focusing on the larger, more transformative question, “*How does Jesus draw you into his mission of bringing in a new era in the story of the world, an era in which he rules?*”²

This shift in focus makes our sin problem look more serious, not less. In these Rescuer stories, sin is to ignore or resist the new era that Christ proclaimed, died for, and was raised to lead. Salvation is to embrace the new era whole-heartedly, walking through the door Christ opened for us. Salvation and transformation are intertwined. If we are not involved in the new era under Christ’s rule, our sin problem has not been dealt with yet.

We call this approach “*transformative evangelism*” to distinguish it from the common view that evangelism is a self-contained step 1 and transformation is a later step 2.

WHY ARE THE “RESCUER” STORIES BEING TESTED?

The intention of experiment with these seven is not to come up with one “perfect” way to summarize the Bible and the gospel. On the contrary, it is to illustrate the richness of God’s message when viewed from different angles. These stories are intended as inspirations and templates for local writers and editors, who all have full permission to edit them freely and produce the “best,” most transformative version for their context as the Spirit leads them.

All seven of the test versions are recent writings by Stan Nussbaum as part of his development of www.syncx.org. They are not used officially by any organization, and he has no plan to declare any version “finished” or “official”.

As local writers and editors create their own variations, they will produce exactly what Tom Steffen said we should be looking for as the next step in global efforts at evangelism and discipleship—“new observations in narrative theology”:

I’ve noticed that while Christian workers may be well-versed in systematic theology, fewer are familiar with biblical theology, and even fewer with narrative theology. Since the Bible is a Sacred Storybook, a Sacred Drama, with narrative as the predominant genre of choice by the Holy Spirit (approximately 55% of scripture), I fully expect new observations in narrative theology to impact the orality movement in the next decade.”³

The “new observations in narrative theology” will stand out most when local writers are distilling the whole Bible and the whole gospel into their own short metanarratives.⁴ The

² Of the gospel summaries in the bulleted list above, the Gospel Project goes the furthest in the direction the Rescuer is trying to go. The others tend to go straight from the cross and resurrection to the return of Christ in glory, skipping lightly over the Holy Spirit, the Church, and its mission. In other words, they put little emphasis on three key biblical connections between the gospel and transformation in the present.

³ Tom Steffen, “Orality Comes of Age: The Maturation of a Movement.” http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/31_3_PDFs/IJFM_31_3-Steffen.pdf Seen on 31 March 2018

⁴ Some who love systematic theology fear that narrative theology waters down the gospel. See <https://www.gotquestions.org/narrative-theology.html>, para. 4 and 5 explaining why this does not happen when

versions of the Rescuer story give them templates for designing those metanarratives. Steffen uses the analogy of a clothesline to explain metanarrative.

To illustrate, if each [Bible story] lesson heard by an audience represented a piece of clothing, how would the listeners be expected to hold all the clothes without dropping them? We might suggest a linear or circular clothesline to remedy the situation. Metaphorically, this illustrates the need for a metanarrative of the Sacred Storybook.⁵

While doing this pilot experiment with the Rescuer stories, we are also gathering data on evaluative studies of the effectiveness of other metanarratives. That data will help us and/or others design follow-up research to evaluate the actual impact of experiments with the Rescuer stories in various contexts.⁶

VALUE AND USAGE OF FINDINGS

The main value of the experiment will be in what it sparks in each local context. What, if anything, will people like you do with the Rescuer stories once they know they exist? What suggestions will you make about testing the stories further and creating derivative or parallel stories, songs, etc.?

narrative theology is done properly. For my part, I believe that narrative theology is more likely to beef up the gospel with biblical substance. It is some forms of systematic theology that have been watering down the message, producing converts who are not disciples and are not transforming anything.

⁵ Steffen, "Orality Comes of Age," see note 3.

⁶ We are still looking for any actual report of evaluative research on one or more of the other Bible panorama approaches. There is much anecdotal evidence that those various approaches work better than older approaches to evangelism, but not much careful, objective research about them that we have found so far. Chuck Madinger, head of the research track in the International Orality Movement, indicates there is need for more of this type of study. (Personal communication of 9 April 2018).