

Hey, there’s a really important reason why Jesus used parables so much as a key tactic in teaching his disciples—including us as His disciples a couple of thousand years later! That’s because stories are often a very compelling way of communicating what’s desired...and Jesus had a whole lot to communicate! After all, Jesus was turning this world upside down in favor of citizenship in His Kingdom to whoever would believe in Christ! Yes, a whole new way of life—in fact, a whole new *life in Christ*—was being offered. And Jesus’s parables—stories infused with deep insight and startling power—are foundational to a very full life in Christ. For sure, Jesus’s parables never cease to astound careful readers and listeners.

In many of the best examples of effective stories, a storyteller utilizes what we might call the “happily ever after” strategy. The seeds are sown for that when the listener makes deep connection to the key characters involved in great risks or great trauma or great events. Then, in due course, the hero emerges victoriously. And the story ends with a deeply satisfying glow. ‘Course, there’s not a discouraging word in the story about the future...nothing to spoil this perfect ending. No, not a word about future trials!

Now, there’s an interesting seemingly-happily-ever-after real-life drama that starts with a man who died a bit over a century ago. His name was John Reed—he went by “Jack.” So, Jack was a Harvard grad, a radical journalist who went to Russia to report on a very big event, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Then Reed actually served in the radical new Russian government. As a firsthand observer and advocate for the Bolsheviks who overthrew the czarist regime, Reed wrote a number of reports for a magazine called *The Masses*. That was a new, groundbreaking socialist political magazine edited by a guy named Max Eastman.

But then Reed returned to America and, in 1919, he published a book about that Russian upheaval, ultimately known as the Great October Socialist Revolution. Unsurprisingly, Reed’s very influential book, is quite naturally infused with the assumption of “happily ever after”—after all, the “good guys” he joined and advocated for had “won.” Reed’s book was titled *Ten Days That Shook the World*, and, to this very day, it’s touted on socialist websites as important, foundational reading for budding progressives. Back home in the U.S., Reed had helped create the Communist Labor Party of America, served as its international delegate, and participated in Communist activities. But Reed died of typhus in 1920 at age 33, then was honored by the Soviets as only one of three Americans buried in the national cemetery. Yeah, Reed had become very famous—his legacy was firm, mainly from telling his story of the Revolution.

But, of course, the story of the Revolution and its aftermath didn’t stop with Reed’s death. The Communist Soviets who emerged in power due to the Revolution were led by Joseph Stalin, who oversaw the untimely deaths of many millions of people, with many starved in the Terror-Famine in Ukraine in the 1930s. Then, after World War II, the Soviets dropped an “iron curtain” of complete control over many countries in Eastern Europe. And the Soviets routinely imprisoned their political enemies for decades into a network of forced-labor camps called the Gulag. To be blunt, the USSR—this Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—repressed freedom and deeply deprived their citizens economically for decades. But the USSR empire collapsed of its own gross inadequacies in the early 1990s. That’s a fuller sketch of the USSR’s socialism.

Still, Reed was certainly accurate with his book title—*Ten Days That Shook the World*. But any happily-ever-after triumphalism assumed in 1919 was later experienced as a relentless, decades-long nightmare in the USSR and its satellites. You see, Reed’s focus was just on the very beginnings of a supposedly great promise. But Reed’s story was hardly representative of the terror, purges, murders, and evil that followed.

Now, we revisit Max Eastman, that editor of the socialist magazine *The Masses* and the staunch advocate of communism who enlisted Jack Reed as a reporter. Yeah, Eastman actually raised the money to send Reed to Russia in 1917 for his reporting. But in the mid-1920s, after Reed’s death, Eastman lived in Russia and Europe for several years and witnessed the deadly infighting of the Soviet leadership. Then he watched the factual, tragic long-term results of that supposedly Great October Socialist Revolution. By 1955, Eastman had completely refuted it all, publishing his book titled *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism*. For Eastman, the evidence was in: the Bolshevik Revolution, “rather than producing freedom,

produced the most perfect tyranny in all history.” Eastman’s complete change of mind as to the value of socialism was so striking that the famous political economist Friedrich von Hayek referenced Eastman’s migration in his watershed book *The Road to Serfdom*. Yes, Eastman and Reed—close comrades in the socialist trenches—wrote very different stories about socialism! ...But wait, our focus on Reed isn’t done.

In 1981, famed actor Warren Beatty wrote, produced, directed, and starred in a blockbuster movie. Beatty starred as—yeah—Jack Reed and the talented Diane Keaton co-starred as Louise Bryant, Reed’s love interest. The title of this movie was *Reds* because the Communist revolutionaries were known as the Reds.

And, boy oh boy, you talk about a glorious, majestic movie! The story of an amazing, idealistic couple involved in the very heart of one of the most world-changing events in history! *Reds* was nominated for twelve Academy Awards...and won three! And in 2008, *Reds* was named by the AFI as one of the top 10 epic movies of all time. And all of Beatty’s success in his storytelling about Jack Reed and Louise Bryant and their romance and the revolutionary socialists who created so much despair for so many millions—wait, that wasn’t in the story, because Beatty’s storytelling stopped in 1920, the year Reed died.

Sadly, Beatty’s story was *not* a documentary revealing what really happened during the tragic sixty years between the year Reed died and the year that Beatty made his movie. *Reds* was *not* a documentary about *millions* of Ukrainians unnecessarily dying in the Socialist regime’s Terror-Famine. *Reds* was *not* a documentary about the USSR’s horrific forced-labor camp system where countless political prisoners were confined for decades. And Beatty’s story was *not* a documentary about the Berlin Wall topped with barbed wire, yes, built by Soviet Socialists to keep *millions* of their people under their control *from leaving!*

So, which version of the story of the Socialist Revolution do you embrace? Is it the early version of Russian socialism by Reed in *his* book...or is it the sobering, real-world version by Eastman in *his* book...or is it Beatty’s movie version of the early “glory” of socialist revolution and the romance of Reed and Bryant?

Hey, it would be awesome if we could say that highly selective approaches to storytelling are an isolated tactic that very few people use. But folks around the world often tell stories and sell products and advocate religions where they tell a limited version of happily-ever-after, a story that’s not really, fully, truthfully told. Perhaps it’s incomplete or it stops early or it’s wishful thinking or it’s self-serving or it’s simply sloppy. Or maybe it’s just ignorance. But no matter why a story’s narrative falls far short of truth, the damage can be considerable. And hey, this should hit us pretty close to home. We all must ask ourselves, are our business or nonprofit workplaces working diligently to tell the honest-to-goodness current realities of our offerings as well as what’s likely in store for the future?

Let’s face it. In many countries, culture has radicalized. Social behavior has radicalized. Personal behavior has radicalized. Politics has radicalized. Many government officials have radicalized. The advancement in technology is very dramatic. Often, what’s happening today would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. All of this has been mixed together and created a witch’s brew. And to captivate eyeballs, 24/7 stories can be found virtually anytime, anywhere and gin up wild reports that are fantastical—and you know what, sometimes they’re completely false...sometimes they’re completely true...and much of the time they’re somewhere in between—with just enough truth to give credibility to the bias of the storyteller.

So what types of sources are you reading, watching, and listening to...a Jack Reed, a Max Eastman, a Warren Beatty? Specifically, what are the top ten sources of contemporary stories for you? Are you testing it all by the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and the teaching of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26)? For that matter, do you have sure methods to untangle competing stories when multiple storytellers claim Christ?

So, what about *us*? Our accountability to Jesus is for both those stories we spread and stories we originate. What stories are *we* telling about current events? About salvation? Hey, the *authentic* happily-ever-after story of the Cross is *so simple, clear, and ingenious* that each person can choose their direct participation! Yeah, God’s narrative of the Christ...crucified for humanity...is the greatest story of all time! Do tell.

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. You know that the gospel of the Kingdom of God is the only true story regarding its happily-ever-after eternal ending and the simple requirement of a believer humbly believing in the Savior. As a hearer of many stories that claim authority over people’s lives (like in politics or religions), have you fallen for a false happily-ever-after narrative sometime in the past? Explain.
2. Have you found people or companies in your workplace’s supply chain telling a “deliverables” story that falls short of the reality of results? How do you respond to that when it happens? Be specific.
3. Just what are the top ten sources of contemporary stories for you? List them here. Furthermore, are you testing them all by the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and the teaching of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26)? Discuss.