



Speak: How Your Story Can Change the World

Nish Weiseth

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Speak, by popular blogger Nish Weiseth, is a book about the power of telling our own stories and hearing those of others to change hearts, build bridges, advocate for good, make disciples with grace, and proclaim God's kingdom on Earth today.

Nish Weiseth exhorts today's Christians to follow Jesus' example by using story as a vehicle for change.

After all, Jesus was a master storyteller. He frequently and effectively used the art of storytelling to communicate deep truths about God, humanity, love, and eternity to a culture on the brink. His stories defied social norms, revealed God's Kingdom, and fiercely advocated for the least of these.

With examples from Scripture as the foundation, Speak is a call for grace, openness, and vulnerability within the evangelical church. Nish Weiseth encourages those in the Body of Christ to know their own story of transformation and redemption---and to use those stories as a catalyst for change at both a personal and global level.

Speak: How Your Story Can Change the World Details

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From Reader Review Speak: How Your Story Can Change the World for online ebook

Amy E Patton says

I don't often consume a book in one sitting, but I drank Nish Weiseth's book, *Speak: How Your Story Can Change the World* like fine wine in one refreshing evening. Nish knows the heart of story, and she understands how God can use it for His glory. Through truth telling and example, she skillfully encourages her readers to begin telling their stories and listening to others stories with open ears, minds, and hearts.

I recommend *Speak* to writers and speakers. I recommend *Speak* to parents, teachers, business men and women, people in ministry, and everyone in between. If you interact human beings- then you are interacting with someone who has a story. Learning to hear those stories and hold them with grace is an art. Learning to share your story with boldness and humility takes both and courage and faith. Nish Weiseth's book, *Speak*, tells us the reasons we must learn to do both well. Yes, story can change the world.

Jason Kanz says

In her new book *Speak: How Your Story Can Change the World* (2014, Zondervan), Nish Weiseth encourages people to get in the habit of sharing stories with one another. On the back cover, she asks, "How would your life be different if you shared your stories rather than your opinions?"

I was drawn to this book because I believe the question she is asking is an important one. Part of what defines our humanity is that we live in relationship with others and each of us have our own unique stories. We need to get into the habit of seeking to hear one another's stories, showing curiosity about who they are, where they have come from, and where they are going.

Between the covers of the book, Weiseth suggests that we are a divided people, inside the church and outside of it, which she attributed in part to our tendency to assert viewpoints rather than hear stories. She makes the case that stories can help to soften and change our hearts in relationship with other people and that even beyond that, hearing people's stories can help to encourage us to pursue justice and kingdom purposes.

On the positive end, Weiseth is a strong writer, having honed her skills through her blogging career. Within the book, she shares some of her own stories that help to make her point about their importance. She also included stories from other bloggers and the responses they received to further demonstrate how powerful stories can be.

On the other hand, I do have concerns about the underlying message of this book. Although she did not come out and say so, I did have concerns that she was downplaying objective truth. As I read the book, I find myself wondering if she believes that when we seek to listen to one another's stories (which we agree is important), that we must said aside the reality that there is objective truth. Those navigating from a post-modern mindset are much more likely to accept relativism as a way of being. In other words, "my stories

define truth for me, even though they may be different from your stories." I believe this is a mistake, and perhaps it was not her intention, but Weiseth seems to represent the growing post-modernism in the church. My view is that we share our stories with one another, but also that truth is objective and it is often discoverable, even if it is uncomfortable.

On the whole, her message about the importance of stories is one we all need to hear, but not at the expense of what Francis Schaeffer referred to as "True truth".

I received this book free from the publisher through the BookLook Bloggers book review bloggers program. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Suni says

You should read this book, and then come over to discuss it with me over a beverage and snacks. We'll sit in comfy chairs by the big picture window and laugh and commiserate.

That's what this book was about to me: community, friendship, sharing life. That's what stories are to me.

I love stories. I love hearing them, and I love telling them. I am a part of a local community of storytellers. I even belong to a church that celebrates "story". In fact, I belong to the church that brought Nish Weiseth to Salt Lake City.

(Odd, that.)

It's peculiar reading about people you know, neighbourhoods you frequent daily, and community discussions in which you participated, from another's perspective. She's describing my life and my loves, yet she & I hardly know each other. We just happen to breathe the same air. In a sense, this juxtaposition of familiar and separate is a perfect setting for a book about the power of story. Stories have the power to connect us, but true connection & community requires more than the telling of a story.

So, read it. It's well-written and thoughtful. Her stories are compelling and illustrative.

But after you read it, let's connect *for real*.

Julia says

Such a great reflection on the value of relationship, authenticity, and listening in the context of a Christian life. I read this with my book club and it was really interesting to hear how we responded to the ideas about

what it would really look like to value the stories of the people around us in our everyday lives and in faraway places in the world, or what it would look like for me to really value my own story.

Lisa says

For those who doubt their life or story matters, this is a collection of stories to convince you otherwise.

Speak: How Your Story Can Change the World is a sometimes-gentle, sometimes not, kick in the pants for everyone, not just writers or storytellers or speakers, to tell our stories. And it is equal parts inspiring and convicting. (Disclaimer: I received a free copy of the book from Zondervan through the Booklook Bloggers program.)

The author, Nish Weiseth, is the founder of one of my favorite blog spaces, A Deeper Story, and though I haven't read a lot of her work, in particular, I love the mission of the site and the stories shared there. So, I'm pleased to discover I love Weiseth's writing as well.

And her message--that stories are more powerful than all the labeling and stereotyping and arguing policy that goes on--is timely. Over the two days that I read the book, I watched online arguments erupt and devolve into hatred among strangers over stories about a group of Muslims using a community room at a local rec center for a religious observation and about whether a 37-weeks-gestation body found in a garbage can should be called a "fetus" or a "baby." (I digress a little but only to show the relevance of Weiseth's work.)

It is situations like those--and so many more--that call for stories. That urge us to know people for who they are not what we think they are or should be. Weiseth calls us to ask questions, to listen, and to tell our stories in an exchange of humanity. She writes,

This book is a call to do just that-- to change the game by telling the stories of our lives with courage, honesty, and integrity. It's a call to acknowledge that each of our stories is a small piece of the greatest story--God's continual work and transforming power in our lives. (24)

One of my favorite features of the book is the reprinted blog posts at the end of each chapter illustrating how a specific story changes the way we see a particular issue or stereotype. I love that Weiseth shared her book space with other writers to add another layer to the work.

And though she has written a book and lives in Salt Lake City as part of a church plant, Weiseth is also a mother to two young children and immersed in the daily routines of life and family. She insists that our lives don't have to look like a Hollywood movie to matter.

Most people are living life by daily fulfilling the obligations set before them. ... And though you may be living what seems like an ordinary life, faithfully doing what God has placed in front of you to do means you are actually living an extraordinary story. (183)

Not a book just for those who communicate for a living but one for anyone striving to live a life that brings more of the Kingdom of God to earth. Our stories, our journeys, our trials and triumphs, matter. And, as Weiseth says, they can be the catalyst for change in someone else's life.

Laura June says

[I am a BookLook Blogger and received this book free for an honest review.]

Nish is a blogger who I've enjoyed following for the past few years. She is a Christian who openly discusses her struggles with the church and her faith. She is a wise woman with a sharp wit who also has no problem with the occasional expletive. Basically, she's the kind of woman you want to go grab a beer with and discuss life in all its messy detail. [If you haven't read her before I HIGHLY recommend taking a peek at her blog]

When the book arrived in the mail the paperback was deceptively small in size. What it lacks in physical weight, it more than makes up for in intellectual and spiritual weight. In eight chapters Nish uses her own stories and the stories of others to highlight how seemingly small, unextraordinary personal stories can bring about larger change in our world. She also writes about the importance of listening to the stories of others, how much better we can help each other if we only take the time to really listen.

I really don't think I can do justice in a blog review how much of a gift this book was for me. It was like a kick in the pants, in the best way. I have spent a lot of time talking about talking about my story over the past few years, but little time actually talking about my story. Or even properly writing about it. My heart is literally bursting with things I have not yet fully expressed for reason of feeling overwhelmed at the task. Speak helped me see that sharing in everyday conversation with those in your life or listening to the story of someone you just met are also ways of doing that. You don't need to be a best-selling author for your story to be heard and make a difference in the world. You can just be you.

This is a Christian book written by a Christian blogger. There is scripture scattered throughout each chapter. Regardless of your faith, this book is a must-read for anyone who questions the importance of their story. Nish is truly an inspiration, whether you are a Christian or not. She not only talks the talk, but she walks the walk. She went to Ferguson, MO with the express mission to listen and tell the stories if asked [see more on her Twitter feed].

"We have the power to use our own stories and lives to build bridges across the divisive gaps in our cultures. It just takes a soft, knowing nudge on the arm as we first ask, "What do you think?" Listen. Speak. Then listen some more. We can make this world a better place, one story at a time.

Nathan Albright says

[Note: This book was provided free of charge by BookLook/Zondervan Press in exchange for an honest review.]

Although I have never read anything written by the author (who is best known as a blogger about social justice and related concerns, and who is editor-in-chief of A Deeper Story, which provides a collaborative

effort where writers (presumably politically liberal, given the contents of this book) talk about truths of God and caring for people in need), the contents of this book place her squarely within the very familiar area of socially activist Christians and prolific writers (this may possibly include me) with a base in the Portland, Oregon area. Given how unchurched the area of Portland is as a whole, it is astonishing just how many Christian authors are from here given the negligible influence that Christianity in culture or behavior has on the culture of the area. This book begins to indicate why Christians from Portland may be highly motivated to write about Christianity and living faith but do not appear motivated to set a godly example of behavior or godly standards of belief. This is one of those books that passionately (and rightly) proclaims the love of God for the lowly and shows admirable success in personal generosity as well as political activism on behalf of the poor and marginalized. However, this book ultimately does little to arrest the moral decline of our nation, because it seeks to pit orthodoxy (particularly in terms of social matters) against orthopraxy. As a result, this book and its author remind the reader (if that reader is not a political ally of the author) that little in this world is more common than compassion that is wasted because it is not tied to the sorts of behavioral changes that are necessary in order for people to achieve a better life.

Yet there is one thing this book gets, and gets well, that deserves to be said. We have all (myself certainly included, and the author admits it of herself) been damaged by the cynicism and hatred and divisiveness of the political culture around us. The author's central point, and it is a worthy one that deserves reflection and application, is that our salvation may ultimately depend on our ability to overcome this bitterness and division and judgmental nature by seeking to love people as they are and listen to their stories with compassion, not seeking to judge, but rather seeking to show that for those who repent of their wicked ways and turn to God, the door is always open, and that God is immensely gracious. This book speaks a lot about God's grace and its messiness, as our lives are indeed messy and complicated, but it seems to deliberately avoid seeking answers and solutions and programs to that messiness. This book seeks to open a dialogue, a necessary step in our world, but certainly not the final step. It encourages people to speak their stories boldly, not just the good parts, but the whole parts, that people may see the sorts of lives we have lived and the experiences we have had that have shaped our fears and compulsions. God only knows we all have enough of both. The book encourages us to wrestle with the darkness and to avoid placing hasty and nasty labels on others without first hearing them out (the story of how the author herself provokes a fight with her husband over gender politics in the church without first hearing him out is spot on in showing how necessary and how difficult this can be). So long as this book is seen as advocating the first step in a larger process and not the be-all and end-all of dealing with our society's brokenness and messiness, as well as that of people in general, this book can be treasured and appreciated regardless of whether you agree with the positions and opinions of the author or not.

The organization of this book is itself designed in an evangelical sort of way. The book opens with a discussion of the problem of a society and church deeply divided over political issues, where dialogue between people in different camps (as defined by various labels of conduct and identity) is fraught with grave difficulty. Part of that grave difficulty is that we are called both to be righteous and to be merciful. This book seems to pit justice against mercy by appealing to mercy without an overarching belief in the moral standard of God's ways, in the way in which it gives attorneys to an abortionist working for Planned Parenthood who claims to be a Christian leader (one of the reasons why traditional Christianity is unable to serve as a light to the world, because it lacks light itself). Yet this book is right that the issues of our society, or the church, or our own relationships with others, will not be solved without a great deal of conversation without agendas or knives drawn looking to pounce on errors and mistakes in behavior. We all stumble in many ways, we all live in a dark and broken world and we have all been deeply affected by the brokenness of the world around us and in our own families and experiences. Ultimately, healing our brokenness and isolation, in part by sharing our stories and being tender listeners to others (talked about in the second part of the book) is supposed to change our world for better, helping it to become less broken and more in line with

God's ways. If this book has its serious flaws, its virtues are enough for it to be worthy of reflection and application as part of a larger and more complete balance that does not pit law and grace, justice and mercy, obedience and love, but rather shows the complex wholeness of a heavenly Father who gives us His laws for our good, and who holds his hands out to us, and calls for us to forsake evil and turn from our wicked ways that harm ourselves and those around us. So too, when we speak of our own lives, those lives ought to be infused with the love and compassion of God towards others, so that people who might be inclined not to like our opinions at least may understand why we are the way that we are, and view us with compassion in turn. We can all hope for that, I suppose.

Ultimately, a book like this is not to be judged for its words or stories, which are suitably emotional in nature, seeking to tug at the heart-strings. This book as a whole is a strongly emotional appeal that seeks an audience that is female, politically liberal, more inclined to emotional than logical reasoning, and that is hostile to conflict (except when that conflict comes from being a bit of a nag). Rather, this book is to be judged for the action it provokes—building bridges, seeking justice and wholeness, and leading to a more open and sincere and vulnerable sort of behavior on the part of Christians. Some Christians may already do a good job about being authentic about their lives and honest about their own struggles and harrowing life experiences. Yet others will be encouraged to do so to the extent that we do not use our own experiences and backgrounds as a club to beat others with (and truth be told, this book has too much of that, especially with regards to gender and sexual politics), but rather as a way of letting others (and ourselves) know the extent to which we have been deeply shaped by our lives, so that we may seek our way back to God and ultimately walk in His ways, rather than in our own (or worse, demanding that others follow our ways rather than God's ways). To the extent that it encourages its readers to behave better than the practice of the writer in being compassionate to others and gracious in hearing their stories, it will be a successful effort. We could all stand to learn from what it has to say even with a clear-sighted view of its bias and failings.

SaraJane says

pg. 14 "This is why story matters. Because when you listen to a story, you have to give up your stereotypes and your labels."

pg. 25 "The stories of how God transforms our lives and of how we connect with other human beings can have incredible power and influence in our culture."

pg. 27 "Story is the vulnerable sharing of your life experiences with others. It includes everything from the relationships you have with others today to the awkward moments in high school that you can't erase from your memory, no matter how hard you try. Your story includes how and where you grew up and the impact they both had on your life. It also refers to the mistakes you've made along the way. Sharing your story allows others to glimpse how you've been shaped, what matters to you, and why it matters. The power of story becomes evident when..... the walls of isolation we build around ourselves, believing we are the only ones who feel a certain way, come tumbling down when we're vulnerable and honest with each other about both our struggles and our victories."

pg. 39 "It's never as black-and-white as we want it to be. Especially when someone's story gets injected into the conversation. All of a sudden, it gets messy. But it's better if it's messy, I think."

pg. 87 "And may it be so with us. When reaching out with our hands, resources, and love to those in need, may we always look into their faces and listen to their stories. Even though it can seem like the voices of

those on the margins have been silenced, may we remember that they haven't been. They have stories, lives, and experiences too. Sometimes it's our job to simply be a microphone, offering our volume, influence, and privilege for the sake of those who need it most."

pg. 129 "There's nothin' more dangerous and scary than layin' your rap out for someone else to see, to tell them your whole story in hopes that they'll see the Truth in it."

pg. 151 "Believing that the kingdom of God is already present and breaking through on the earth presents us with an invitations, a calling as believers to partner with God in what He is accomplishing in our cities and towns around the world. We're invited to be a reflection of God's unending love for His people. We, the church, have been asked to proclaim the coming kingdom. In this announcement, we are a part of a magnificent story - the story of God redeeming the world. We know this to be true because we've seen it in our own lives. God isn't just a character in our stories; He's the one shaping them, writing them chapter by chapter, line by line."

pg. 186 "What you're doing may not be as important as the how. If you're being faithful in what God has called you to do, He is transforming you and molding you to be more like Christ today than you were yesterday. And that is the greatest story you could ever tell. The story of how God is transforming you is how God's kingdom breaks in on earth today."

Henk-Jan van der Klis says

Where more sermons will not change the world, our personal stories, testimonies of a living faith, can. In *Speak*, popular blogger Nish Weiseth, stresses the importance of using a story as vehicle to explain the gospel, show grace, and proclaim God's Kingdom on Earth today. Though Weiseth doesn't promote a Kingdom Now ('over-realized') theology, it's obvious that goodness, justice, giving, neighbouring and church planting show the Kingdom to the world. In 8 short chapters stories from the Bible, Weiseth's own pilgrimage on parenting, leaving Portland, Oregon for Salt Lake City, Utah, spiritual gifts, mission trip, evangelical church leadership, etc. are illustrated by blog posts with inspirational thought from friends, and fellow writers including some of the reaction they sparked. To help you along, she also shares profiles of NGOs like World Vision and International Justice Mission as part of her call to action.

Annie Downs says

This is exactly the book our generation of storytellers needs to read. Strong examples, deep heart stuff, really moving reminders of how we are to live and write and share.

Karen says

Well, color me surprised.

I planned to hate this book. Actually, before I planned to hate it, I planned to summarily dismiss it and slide it back into the library book drop without cracking it open once I realized I'd selected a Christian book instead of the edgy and liberal power of story book I had expected - and hoped for.

I did not hate this book. I also did not love this book. I found many, many parts of this book problematic, infuriating, and troublesome, but I also saw something familiar in the author. And there were some brilliant nuggets from the pages, one of which encapsulates our basic shared belief: "I think the world needs more of this - good discussion over shared meals" (p. 62).

I could rant for quite some time about the difficulties I have with this book - the author's acquiescence to the idea that she must wait for the men in her church to grant permission for women to assume leadership roles; the subtle judgment of one article from her website that asserts that not all patients of Planned Parenthood are there for abortions, but fails to stand up for the rights and realities of the women who may need those services; and the moral snobbery and racism inherent in the casting of non-Christians as "dark" and their ideas of god as "false and skewed." While I'm sure the author and I could sit down at her oft-mentioned coffee shop and have an engaging and thoughtful conversation, her certainty of the rightness of her position and its attendant trappings of privilege and oppression makes me apprehensive, angry, and suspicious of her motives. Similarly, I suspect she might question the motives this radical feminist, practitioner of earth-based spirituality, wildly left-leaning progressive, activist-minded Lesbian brings into the conversation. Maybe that's okay.

I agree with the author and found myself moved by these statements:

"Sometimes it's our job to simply be a microphone, offering our volume, influence, and privilege for the sake of those who need it most." (p. 87)

"When we listen to voices that have been silenced, we become more fully human." (p. 93)

And I wanted to just hug the author of her forward, Shauna Niequist, who wrote, "we thought the distance would keep us safe. It doesn't. It only keeps us lonely." This, and her exquisite phrase "a holy curiosity for everyone you see," is what kept me reading. I, like many of us, tend to read people who think just like me - or, once in a while, I read people with whom I vehemently disagree just to exercise my argumentation and refutation skills. Rarely do I read someone with whom I share considerable common ground and common approach as well as deep and abiding difference. It's good exercise.

Weiseth and I certainly agree on the importance of listening to one another and knowing people and their positions beyond headlines and stereotypes, and that's a good thing. It remains uncomfortable for me to consider, however, that the kind stranger curious about my life and my stories is, in part, using that interest as a means to religious conversion. That feels deceptive and manipulative, and I suspect Weiseth and I would have a hard time seeing eye-to-eye on that.

Additionally, I believe that the goodness she describes as the "kingdom" and which includes people helping those in need, engaging with their communities, and working toward justice exists with and without the influence of religion. I believe people want the best for this world, and I don't think Christians care more, or that Jews care more, or Pagans care more, or Atheists care more, or Secular Humanists care more, or lapsed Catholics now flirting with Methodism care more. People care. Call it god, or Jesus, or collective consciousness, or enlightened self-interest, or Wicca, or nothing at all. People have the capacity and the desire to be and do good in the world.

And, yes, our stories matter.

Kacy Lou Leyba says

Hands down one of the best books I've read as of late. This book has inspired me to write-- to tell the stories of the marginalized and the voiceless in the Kingdom and seeking after God. This was exactly what I needed to read.

Stina says

This book has further inspired me to share my story with those around me. It benefits no one to walk around pretending that we have the perfect lives. God works in and through our stories, that goes for everyone. Even the "mundane" parts are important! Great book!

Leigh Kramer says

The level of vulnerability and high quality storytelling made this a book I couldn't put down. Nish has given us all a gift with Speak.

Kevin Shoop says

Grade: A

Personally, this book couldn't have come at a better time. Although written from a devoutly Christian (not necessarily evangelical) perspective, I believe this book would be helpful for anyone who is struggling to find their voice in this world. For me, it not only gave me the courage to write again, but also the motivation to LISTEN to others, especially those whose voices are often muted. Highly recommended.
