

BCL ep351 Best of BaseCamp Live: Telling Better Stories with Jacob Hess

We're raising our families in an increasingly challenging cultural moment. The stories that shape our children are loud and constant, and yet God calls us to live a different life, one where the stories are better, stories that inspire us and our children to a life of flourishing, a life that is constant and confident, one that prevents us from drifting with the culture around us. So how do we fill our homes and our classrooms with better stories, ones that capture our hearts and imaginations and minds and point us to truth? How do we find and tell better stories, knowing that we have the greatest story, the one true story that echoes every other story, the story of God's grace in Jesus Christ? Join us for this Base Camp Live Flashback, where we highlight an interview from the past, one that is worth listening to again.

Our guest, Jacob Hess, guides us to become better storytellers in our homes and in our schools through art and daily life, helping our children to love what God loves and to be able to discern, well, what is true. Join us for this episode of Base Camp Live. Mountains.

We all face them as we seek to influence the next generation, get equipped to conquer the challenges, summit the peak, and shape exceptionally thoughtful, compassionate, and flourishing human beings. We call it ancient future education for raising the next generation. Welcome to Base Camp Live.

Now your host, Davies Owens. Welcome to another episode of Base Camp Live. Davies Owens, your host here with you on the journey of raising the next generation.

One of the great joys of speaking at your schools and getting out to conferences is that I had the privilege of meeting so many of you face-to-face and hearing your stories. And often I will hear someone say, you know, I was on this really long road trip and I binged listened to 20 episodes of Base Camp Live. And I'm thinking, gosh, that is a long road trip.

And that is a lot of Base Camp Live. But it points out an interesting and important reminder, which is that most of these episodes over the last eight years are evergreen, meaning they are still just as relevant and significant today as they were back when they were recorded. And so from time to time, I like to dig into the archives and find an episode that I think really speaks to today, even though the one that we're about to listen to was recorded five years ago with Jacob Hess, this important message of how stories are formed and the imagination is created.

And ultimately the habits and the loves deep within us and our children are formulated through the stories that are around us, which of course, this is why big tech and social media and all these other influencing forces are so powerful because they strike at the heart of story. Jacob Hess received his Master of Divinity from Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. He moved to Seattle where he and his wife work in a ministry capacity in a local church.

Jacob's years in school increased his passion for writing and for reading, but he's always had this love for stories, whether they were told with a pen or a page or through music with rhythms and rhymes. And he agrees and often quotes J.R.R. Tolkien, who writes, quote, the pot of soup, the cauldron of story has always been boiling and to have it continually being added to with new bits, dainty and undainty, unquote. Story is what forms us.

And I cannot wait for you to hear or re-hear this episode from Jacob Hess. Before we do, just a quick thank you to Wilson Hill Academy sponsoring this episode, along with the Champion Group, Life Architects Coaching and our partners at the Herzog Foundation. Also, just want to quick mention that thank you for all of you who are part of the Zipcast world, being that your schools get to listen every week to our short form audio segment, blending the local news and updates from your school leaders, along with national experts on parenting and education.

We had a fully subscribed fall and have not had room for new schools to join us up until now. In fact, we have got an opportunity in January if you're a school or a part of a school and you're listening. It's not too late.

In fact, I would love for you to join us in January, but reach out to us here in the next couple of weeks. Just go to zipcast.media. There's a lot of advantages to joining even halfway through the year. And we've got some special opportunities for you there, zipcast.media. Well, without further ado, let's jump back into this conversation with Jacob Hess.

Good to have this conversation with you. For folks that don't know you, you have many hats that you wear. You're a pastor, a minister of music and media, singer, songwriter.

You're an author of a brand new book called Bright Abyss that we're going to talk about. But share a little bit of your background for folks that don't know you. Yeah, so I grew up in a Christian home in Oregon.

I was actually homeschooled for quite a while. Like the grades between like kind of like in middle school. And that was a great time, like formative experience.

I think my mom really instilled like a love for story and through that education by, you know, reading me like lots of like Lord of the Rings and stuff like that. And like really engaging in that kind of stuff. And we just watched a lot of movies, which wasn't necessarily a part of the curriculum.

Did your mom make you read the book before you watched the movie? There you go. I did, yeah. She read it to me before they came out, actually.

Okay, very good. So you have, you know, as we focus our conversation on this idea of this cultural moment that we're in and the importance of really, how do we, if we want our children to ultimately flourish, we want them to be alive in Christ, there's a lot working against us today. I mean, we could make long list of our cultural moment, the struggles for identity being played out in politics or racial tension or COVID loneliness and disillusionment.

I mean, even among believers, there's lots of causes, but I know that you are really advocating this idea that we sort of rediscover really what I would, you know, I think biblically is just worship, a sense of sort of living before the presence of God every day. Talk about what this vision you have for helping us to live more rich in our lives. Yeah, so I've been involved in worship ministry for quite a while, both in and outside of the church, and I got my Master's of Divinity and I've been really studying these things and just rediscovering, like you said, the importance of what worship is not just for when we gather on Sundays, but for all of life.

So, Harold Best wrote this book called *Unceasing Worship*, which talks about how everyone is worshipping, whether they're Christian or not. Everyone has something that they're living for, something that they're living towards, and something that they're depending on. And as followers of Christ, we depend on Christ, we live for Him and we live towards Him.

And that happens not just when we gather on Sunday, but in every moment of life and everything that we do can be an act of worship. And so, I think I've just seen, I think sometimes we can lose sight of that in what we're doing through the day-to-day, whether it's, you know, teaching, you know, kids in education, or whether it's like, you know, making dinner, you know, or making gardening, all these things can be acts of worship, if we do it towards God and with Him as our focus and our goal. So, what is that? You know, I think most of us who've grown up in the church would go, absolutely agree with that.

I can, you know, I know there's verses like First Chronicles 16, where it says, you know, seek His presence continually. And I think we all kind of understand that. We also know, well, you know, can you actually be in a business meeting or in a classroom or in like constantly, continually? But there is something I think we've lost that I hear you talking about.

I mean, just as soulish creatures on this earth, we so often parse out, God gets parked over here the first 30 seconds of our class, we pray, or we go to church and we go through these motions. But what does that recovery look like? I know for you, it's deeply tied into the arts. I mean, that's very much the frame that you come out of.

We're going to talk about your book here in just a moment. But you've talked about liturgy, kind of unpack that a little bit. What is liturgy? And why does that play maybe a role in solving this problem? Yeah, so liturgy, I've kind of, I'm starting to rediscover the importance of liturgy for worship.

And what liturgy does is it helps us to walk through the story of the gospel in what we're doing in a worship service. So, it helps us take us through, you know, God is creator, us, you know, He gives us these commands, we fail those, we confess before Him. He gives us, you know, He responds with the gospel with His grace.

And so, it just takes you through that story. But the liturgy is something that we can bring into our everyday lives as well, and not just something that we engage with on a Sunday. There's this great, there's a couple volumes of it actually called *Every Moment Holy*, which is by The

Rabbit Room.

Are you familiar with them? Not extensively. So, tell us more. Yeah.

Yeah. So, it's Andrew Peterson started this, it's like a collaboration of Christian artists and writers. And they put out different books and things like that.

And they put out a couple volumes of this liturgy that is for every day. Like this, that's called, it's Every Moment Holy. And so, it tries to instill the holiness of every moment by inviting God into that moment.

And so, they have liturgies for every day. They have liturgies for like students and educators. They have liturgies for birthdays and all these different events where you can do this thing before God.

It's not that God isn't in that moment, but so often we don't realize that because we're not acknowledging Him. So, what is it? Yeah. Because again, I think, well, first of all, just, I know some are listening that are in kind of non-liturgical traditions.

I mean, if you grew up in a world where liturgy meant sort of, you know, the chosen frozen or the bells and smells and like, are they really believing in God? Then we kind of, the pendulum swings in these dramatic sways. And I think what we're finding is even in the more Protestant evangelical churches, this desire for something sacred and set apart and different. And to your point, there's an intentionality.

It's not just come and be received, but walk a path. So, what does that look? What does liturgy look like? Washing dishes or working in the garden or engaging? How does that play out in your mind? Well, just taking a step back, like the importance of liturgy. So, I've been reading these books by James K. Smith that talk about this importance for worship and for every moment.

And he really captures the importance of creation and how God made us as creatures. And as creatures, we're guided not necessarily by just our minds, but also our desires. And so, the things that we love are really the things that guide us and direct us.

And it's really, and guide us and direct us into forming habits. And it's really our habits that determine our actions and our character in a lot of ways. And so, these liturgies help us to form the right kind of habits and to direct our imaginations and our loves towards the right things.

And so, that's why they're important. It's doing these things over and over again. It's not just a rote thing.

It's something that actually helps to capture our imaginations for who God is, and for the way He made us, and for what we're meant for. And doing these things again and again can really form that in us. And there's lots of liturgies in the world around us.

I mean, consumerism, for example, like the Amazon phenomenon, basically. You scroll, you

click, it gets to your door. That forms a certain kind of mentality that things should be instant, right? And if things are not instant, then they're not good, or they're not worthwhile.

So, it breaks down that patience and that long-suffering. So, I mean, that's just one example of a liturgy out there that is forming us against God and His Kingdom. So, these things are really important to instill in us and to help form us in the right direction.

So, your question, like, how does this look on the ground? Well, I know for my wife and I that we actually use that book, Every Moment Holy, during the week a lot of times. So, what we do is we take one day out of the week to just rest, and to take a Sabbath rest is kind of how we form it. And we don't worry about work.

And for us, that's not just a day to pray, you know, and read the Bible and stuff. It's a day to pray, to read the Bible. We use this liturgy to kind of form the day, like to start it and to end it in a lot of ways.

And then we also play and we enjoy creation. We go on hikes and things and just encounter God in the beauty of the world around us. And so, that helps to form our week in a different sort of way than the just rushing through it, you know, the nine to five kind of mentality.

That's a great example. And those who've listened to Base Camp for any length of time know, I talk a lot about exactly what you just said, Jacob, especially as classical Christian educators, we often talk about we're not just in the information business, we're in the formation business and formation equals attending to our habits. I talk a lot about Charlotte Mason, because I think she, as a classical educator, really understood the importance that she says, nine out of 10 things we do in life are habitual.

And I think that's really interesting. We have an Amazon liturgy. Everything we do is liturgy.

Everything we do is habit. And even if we don't think of it in a church context of liturgy, life is liturgy. And I can think of, I'm just resonating with what you're saying, because I can think of educators who have said, you know, the classroom liturgy does, there's a liturgy of your classroom.

And so, for instance, something as simple as, how do you begin class? Do you begin by, you know, whistling and saying, hey, let's get started? Or do you say something a little bit more focused, like, let's commence with class. Let's begin with prayer. Let's set some structure to set a tone for what that experience is about to be.

So. Yeah. And it doesn't have to be anything like grandiose.

Right. Like, when I welcome people into worship on a Sunday, I welcome them by saying that this is gathered worship, which is different than individual worship. And this is what God is inviting us into.

And that's really important, because you're like, hey, welcome, let's get started. Like, that's all different, right? Then, hey, God is inviting us into something. You know, the one who has called us, I'm not the one calling you.

And so, that little difference is so important. But you have to think about those things and be intentional about them. Yeah.

Well, I think here, I think we're in a culture of pragmatism and we tend to become, especially in education, we become too cerebral and we forget. I mean, if there's a battle between the head and the heart and people will always debate this. I mean, I think the heart's always going to win out.

And I think that sense of what we're driven by our desires and our loves. And we're not in that business, as you're saying, of forming that. So, I mean, what I'm hearing you say is really significant, because it manifests itself in all aspects of life.

And it has a lot to do with story. So, I want to talk just a little bit, then we're gonna take a break and come back, because I really want to hear more of your story and the thinking behind it. But just talk specifically about connecting or connect liturgy and story.

Like, why is that? What's the connection there? So, liturgy really is story in bodily form. So, liturgies capture our bodies to act out as story. And the story is really the tell us, like, what is that liturgy guided towards? What is it directed towards? And so, story is important because it instills and it captures our imaginations.

And it's what we imagine, how we see the world around us is what informs what we love. And so, and which instills our, which informs our desires and what we are directed towards and what the habits we make. So, it really starts with the imaginations in a lot of ways.

And so, capturing the imagination through liturgy is because liturgy is telling a story. And I mean, that's why most of the Bible is story. We are story people.

God made us as creatures who need story. Like, we need water and like, we need food. Like, it's what we live off of because it's what guides us and directs us.

And so, the stories that we listen to and that we put into us are really important. We need to be thoughtful about that. And ultimately, as a follower of Christ, I think every story should, like, a lot of stories out there that don't seem to actually do point to the gospel, because it's what as creatures we long for.

We long for a God who redeems, who saves. The problem is a lot of people are worshiping other gods, like false gods that don't do that. Well, I think again, if I like to speak of in terms of the kind of the currency that we trade in, you know, you go to a foreign country, there's different currency.

The currency of our culture is very much one of desires and passions and loves. And so, if our academic world is very stoic and cognitive only, and we can cite all of the kings of the Old Testament, and we know everything that Pliny the Elder said, that's great. But if it doesn't stir us and drive us, it never really forms us.

That's what, again, I think is the point you're making. So, how do we engage in this currency? And I think we have to use the arts. I think we have to use story.

We have to use liturgy is what you're saying. So, let's take a quick break, because I really want to get into your book. And I love the vision.

And just as a teaser, I guess you've actually said it's kind of this interesting combination of kind of Star Wars meets Lord of the Rings. So, that's, I mean, that alone is intriguing. So, we're going to take a break and come right back with Jacob Hass and hear more about this interesting and fantastic new book you've written.

I know as a school parent and administrator that like many of you, when I hear the word fundraising, it can make me feel a little bit uncomfortable. But there's good news. Our friends at the Champion Group have created something different, a fundraiser that is simple and effective.

The good news is there's no selling of cookie dough, wrapping paper, light bulbs, and it's one that actually brings in significant support for our schools. It's called Feed the Need. And at its core, it's a peer-to-peer fundraiser, but it's so much more than that.

The campaign builds toward a powerful service event where students pack and ship 10,000 meals for families in need, both here at home and around the world. These meals don't just meet a physical need, they open the door for the gospel to be shared. And that's what makes Feed the Need so unique.

It's not just a way to raise money, it is a discipleship experience. And giving students a hands-on service project at your school provides them an opportunity to not only connect your community to a greater mission, but it does provide your school with real financial resources that you need to thrive. Feed the Need is a fundraiser with eternal impact, practical, purposeful, and Christ-centered.

To learn more about how your school can be a part of Feed the Need, visit thechampiongroup.com or check our partners page on the Base Camp Live website. During this short break, I have a special invitation to all school leaders, administrators, and teachers. I want you to imagine for a moment stepping away from your everyday routine at school and diving deep into the rich foundations of Christian education, surrounded by world-class scholars, seasoned classroom teachers, and administrative experts with years of experience running schools with a lot of wisdom to share.

That's exactly what the Herzog Foundation's Institute is offering. I've had the joy of serving as a

training coach for the last few years, leading their two-and-a-half-day training on spiritual formation and another one on parent engagement. They offer close to 50 unique training events ranging from board governance to marketing to classroom best practices.

They even offer a training on how to teach the great books. And the best part of all? Well, thanks to the generosity of the Herzog Foundation, these training events, including lodging, are completely free for educators. Institutes are located around the country in beautiful locations, including at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., and the Reagan Library in Santa Barbara.

Don't miss this incredible opportunity. Check out the details at theherzogfoundation.com. Welcome back to Base Camp Live here with Jacob Hess talking about this new book of his called *The Bright Abyss*. Jacob, explain this book to us.

It's an intriguing title. What is this all about? Yeah. So, the story follows this kid named Jeremiah.

It's in a universe completely different from our own. So, kind of everything's just made up, you know. But it follows this kid named Jeremiah who has grown up with these stories that his father told him about his people's past, but the world around him has really forgotten and disregarded that past.

And so, his father passes away and hands him this family heirloom that he discovers holds the secrets to stopping these creatures that are trying to consume the universe. They're creatures that are kind of behind the scenes that people don't really see or know, but they're trying to destroy everything, basically. So, he has to, you know, go on this adventure.

He meets people along the way who help him or hinder him. And yeah, so, it's kind of a fun story. Yeah.

Is there an age group you're sort of had in mind when you're writing it? Or is it kind of everybody? I think it does connect with everybody. It's kind of the typical action story, but I think it's great for that young adults age group. I would say *Chronicles of Narnia* is what it's similar to.

It's a little, probably a little more violent in some spots, but yeah. Is it future set? It sounds like it is. I mean, if the *Star Wars* component, okay.

It's like set in the, it's like a sci-fi kind of feel. So, there's aliens and spaceships and stuff like that. That sounds pretty intriguing.

So, you know, the question I'm sure some are thinking, you know, I guess as I think back on my own sort of what formed me and my stories growing up, I think as Christians, sometimes I think there's some that maybe are suspicious of fiction versus nonfiction thinking that you really should go read a good, you know, stout theology book. That would be a good godly thing to do,

but wasting time with spaceships and future stuff. And you know, this seems like, you know, popcorn candy or something.

So, how do you respond to that? Because I certainly don't agree with that. But I mean, where does that play out in your mind? No, I mean, that is something to think about. I mean, there's actually a minister who I became good friends with.

And he's like, you're a good writer. Why don't you write nonfiction? You know, he was thinking the same thing, like, use your powers for good, basically. But I think fiction is important for Christians to engage in, because it's really our stories that are forming us, whether we realize it or not.

And Hollywood is pumping out story after story, you know, Disneyland and Disney World, the whole genre is pumping out story after story that are really forming the imaginations of our kids, in some ways good, in some ways that are not good, some ways that actually go against the gospel and who God is, and who He's made us to be. And so, I think it's super important for Christians to engage in storytelling, in storytelling that's captivating and that is exciting, because it's in the process of engaging in those stories that we are directed towards the truth, even when we don't realize it. And it's really formation that goes on under the hood, like, without us realizing it at the moment.

I think it's very well said. That's something that we, again, we talk about a good bit on the podcast in terms of, I call it getting, you know, an inoculation. It's sort of like, you know, parents will put actually, willingly put a little bit of the smallpox, you know, disease into their child's arm, because their body is going to build an immunity to it.

So, when we read the great books, they're not always, you know, candy coated, sweet little Christian books. There's really difficult things and broken things and awkward things that are in these books that then give us that perspective. So, when we look, so again, walk us into your book.

And again, we began by talking about how do we, in a world, in a cultural moment where there's so many young people, in particular adults too, they're just feeling disconnected from really the gospel, from worshiping in every moment. Where does that happen to your character? So, if I'm looking over the shoulder of Jeremiah in the book, where do I sort of experience his discovery that might become my discovery of how to live for Christ? Go ahead. Yeah.

So, the idea for the book really started to develop around this world that was, like, we live in a very secular culture, right? Where the disregards the divine in many aspects. And so, I kind of just thought, like, what would that be like if there was one person, just, like, one person or maybe one or two people who actually believed that there was more than what you see right there in front of you. So, Jeremiah is really living in a highly secularized world that disregards anything beyond what is seen before him.

And he's influenced by that, but he has this longing and this desire for these stories that he's heard of a good creator who is trying to redeem the world. He has a longing that these are true. And so, what Jeremiah does, he starts, he kind of just kind of stumbles along and finds out that everything around him is actually haunted by this divine person who is reaching out to him, calling out to him, and calling him to live for more than just what is right there in front of him.

And to really believe these stories that he thought were just, you know, fun stories, but that are actually true. And so, it really plays with ideas of, like, belief and unbelief, forgetfulness, like how we often, that's, like, the great sin that we see that Israel continually struggles with. They continually struggle with forgetting the God who saves them.

And so, I think in a lot of ways, the church in America has, for many churches, at least, have forgotten that same thing and have become basically trumpets for different political ideologies. And so, it kind of wrestles with some of those ideas. Like I said, it wrestles with the natural world and the divine and, like, the good and bad that is there that's hidden that we don't see and exchanging lies for truth and depending on God to overcome, like, the evil that we see within us and all around us.

So, those are kind of some of the ideas that it wrestles with. Was there a specific, again, you mentioned the influence of the Lord of the Rings. I mean, were you kind of, was that sort of in the back of your mind as far as sort of a maybe a mold to kind of build off of or an idea? What was driving your creativity there? I think the Star Wars plot arc was really what guided the bare bones of the story.

And Lord of the Rings, I took in just kind of a lot of like world building and kind of flavor from Lord of the Rings. So, is this a one and done book? Is this now going to be like Star Wars and have lots of connected series in the future? It's the first in a series. So, I'm working on the second one right now.

And that will hopefully be out by the end of the year. And I'm also, I have a short story that I'm going to put up on my website for free pretty soon as well that's in this world. Yeah.

So, again, I'm kind of back to just what would be the vision if a young adult read this or an adult read this? How would, and they put the book down and they walked out the door. What would hopefully in your mind be a hopeful new perspective that would be influencing how they engage the world around them? What would be different? Yeah. I mean, I think just the reality of the seriousness of the spiritual battle that we all live in, like in the sacredness of the world around us, because God, this is where the battle is taking place.

And we don't always see it, but we, as followers of Christ are called to engage in it. And so, we are called to engage in this battle and to partner with God and bring in His kingdom. And so, just kind of a grandness of that call and of the importance of every moment for engaging in it.

Yeah. Which again, one could convey that to the same young person with 10 bullet pointed theological truths that we all need to know and probably would know and say we know, but we might not viscerally feel it, believe it, be compelled by it. So, I think that's, it's a very, I love how you've, the writing is backed by a philosophy of here's how I'm going to change a generation.

I want to really meet them at the point, the currency they're trading as we talked about before, to form them, to love what God loves, to engage the world differently. And so, I think, I love your book is really, it's kind of a case study in how to bring that to life, but the application could be, like you said earlier, in the garden or in the classroom or in our home, like there is a habit of everyday life and how do we use those 24 hours God has given us. So, yeah, very good.

Well, I want to encourage people to come find the book, tell them where they can find it and learn more about what you're doing. Yeah. So, you can find the book at jacobeheess.com and E is just my initial issue or middle initial.

Yeah. And then it's on Amazon as well, just as the Bright Abyss, they can check it out there. And yeah, I'm also on Instagram and Facebook and stuff like that.

Fantastic. Yeah. And if they sign up for my email list, they can get a free copy of an ebook that I wrote called Echoes of Beauty, which is basically my philosophy of beauty and kind of my manifesto of like why I'm doing what I'm doing and the importance of beauty for everyday life.

Which sounds like worthy of a whole nother podcast. But yeah, we've definitely talked a lot about beauty on Base Camp and I think that's something that drives a lot of, like you said, what's been now taking the form of the book, Bright Abyss. So, well, Jacob, thanks so much for your time.

Excited to continue conversations with you and appreciate all the work you've done in reminding us to live in this rich tapestry this world God has made and all of these opportunities for everyday living and liturgies. So, blessings to you. Thanks so much.

Yeah. Thanks for having me. Thank you for listening to this episode of Base Camp Live.

Be sure to check out our website, BaseCampLive.com for more than eight years of timeless episodes that you'll find helpful and encouraging, as well as the helpful resources offered on our partners page. The views and opinions expressed in this program are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of our partners like the Herzog Foundation. See you back next week.