

Praise for *Jesus and the Beanstalk*

“In a world that’s never been more crowded with noise, do you wonder if you’ll ever again find a fresh voice with a new idea, especially about personal spiritual growth? Tempted as I am to keep this discovery to myself and wish you good luck unearthing your own, I learned too much from this book to do that in good conscience. Lori Stanley Roeleveld’s *Jesus and the Beanstalk: Overcoming Your Giants and Living a Fruitful Life* is the antidote to the glut of drivel that masquerades as pious self-help books these days. Do yourself a favor and see how Lori deftly uses humor and uncommon sense to mine biblical truth from an unlikely fairy tale and painlessly nurture you in the process.”

—**Jerry B. Jenkins**, *New York Times* best-selling author

“*Brilliant* is an overused word. But I can’t help using it to describe *Jesus and the Beanstalk*, because this book is brilliant. The book ticked me off (because it’s deeply challenging), stirred hopes I haven’t felt for an age (because of how real Roeleveld makes Jesus), and made me nod with an admiring smile (because she perfectly nailed my inner thoughts and questions in ways I hadn’t been able to articulate). This is a beat-up book. What I mean is you’ll underline, dog-ear, and reread it so often it’ll soon remind you of *The Velveteen Rabbit*. Tattered and yet beautiful because it has changed you from your core and is utterly real.”

—**James L. Rubart**, best-selling author of *The Long Journey to Jake Palmer*

“*Jesus and the Beanstalk* is no bedtime story. It’s a survival guide for Christians living in a land of giants... the type that make us want to hide under the covers. *Jesus and the Beanstalk* is packed with practical insights and scripture that help us become seed-planting, stalk-climbing, stone-slinging, giant-slaying disciples of Christ. You can do this... and you won’t be alone. So throw back the covers. Start climbing. There are giants to fight.”

—**Tim Shoemaker**, author and speaker

“Christian scholars and apologists have rightly noted that introducing the gospel to the postmodern mind requires a different approach. One such approach is that used by Jesus—it involves story. Jesus’ parables were not just cute set pieces to His ministry, but powerful tools for challenging intellectual strongholds and personal

paradigms. In *Jesus and the Beanstalk*, Lori Roeleveld not only honors the parable principle, she employs it to great success. Springboarding off the most basic of childhood tales, Roeleveld deconstructs the story of the youthful, adventurous giant-killer into a practical, challenging invitation to spiritual growth. With prose rich in humor and illustration, Roeleveld takes us on a journey through Scripture, fleshing out biblical principles in simple, yet profoundly prophetic ways. A great example of postmodern engagement as well as a fun, insightful, challenging read.”

—**Mike Duran**, author of *The Telling*

“In *Jesus and the Beanstalk: Overcoming Your Giants and Living a Fruitful Life*, Lori Roeleveld helps us discover the giant-slaying heritage we have as Jesus followers. Although Christ’s powerful arsenal of truth is available to us, we often spend our lives running from the stockpile of weapons, trying to bargain our safety with mere beans. With insight and wisdom, Lori teaches us how to gather slingshot stones for battle and confidently slay the obstacles of our Christian lives.”

—**Vonda Skelton**, author, speaker, and founder of Christian Communicators Speakers Training

“Lori Stanley Roeleveld has given us new spiritual and practical motivation for increasing our ministry effectiveness. This book is refreshing and relevant to daily life. Lori weaves creative, practical, and powerful possibilities for us, as disciples to live out our faith through sharing Christ in encouraging ways.”

—**Rev. Jim Hollis**, Pastor of Northside UMC and Executive Director at Proactive Ministries

Other books by Lori Stanley Roeleveld

Red Pen Redemption

Running from a Crazy Man (and Other Adventures Traveling with Jesus)

JESUS
and the
BEANSTALK

*Overcoming Your
Giants and Living
a Fruitful Life*

LORI STANLEY
ROELEVELD

Abingdon Press
Nashville

JESUS AND THE BEANSTALK
OVERCOMING YOUR GIANTS AND LIVING A FRUITFUL LIFE

Copyright © 2016 by Lori Stanley Roeleveld

All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission can be addressed to Permissions, The United Methodist Publishing House, 2222 Rosa L. Parks Blvd., P.O. Box 280988, Nashville, TN, 37228-0988 or e-mailed to permissions@umpublishing.org.

Macro Editor: Holly Halverson

Published in association with Leslie H Stobbe Literary Agency.

To protect the privacy of certain individuals, the names and identifying details have been changed.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Roeleveld, Lori Stanley, author.

Title: Jesus and the beanstalk : overcoming your giants and living a fruitful life / Lori Stanley Roeleveld.

Description: First [edition]. | Nashville, Tennessee : Abingdon Press, 2016.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016011738 | ISBN 9781501820045 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Success—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Jack and the beanstalk—Miscellanea. | Fairy tales—Miscellanea. |

Storytelling—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Bible. Peter, 2nd, I, 1-10—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: LCC BV4598.3 .R655 2016 | DDC 248.4—dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016011738>

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*To my children, Zack and Hannah:
May you be effective and fruitful in your knowledge of Jesus Christ, and may you
topple every giant this side of glory. I can honestly say I will love you forever.*

CONTENTS

Once Upon a Foreword	ix
Why Atheists Fear Fairy Tales	xi
PART 1: JESUS AND THE BEANSTALK	
1. Living in a Land of Giants	3
2. A Long Line of Giant-Killers	11
3. A Fairy Tale and a Promise from God	15
4. Where Peter Spills the Beans	25
PART 2: TRADING IN OUR COWS	
5. Loving Jack's Mom	37
6. Surviving the Famine	45
7. Jack Was Nothing Without the Vine	53
8. How the World Cries Out for Beans	63
PART 3: CLINGING TO THE VINE	
9. Faith Buries the Beans	75
10. Virtue from the Ground Up	103
11. Knowledge for the Climb	129
12. Self-Control for Repeat Offenders	153
13. Steadfastness in Slippery Times	175
14. Godliness for Giant-Killers	197
15. Brotherly Affection with Backbone	219
16. Love That Invites and Incites	243

Happily Ever Afterword: Ready to Face the Giants?	267
An Invitation to Continue the Conversation.....	269
Hints and Helps for Using This Book Individually and in Small Groups	271
Acknowledgments	275
Notes	277

ONCE UPON A FOREWORD

The woman across the table from me was pleasant, slightly nervous, and seemed uncertain what I would say. We were at a writers conference in North Carolina. She was a conferee, and I was on faculty. At such conferences, time is set aside for attendees to schedule fifteen minutes with a faculty member to ask questions and even get a brief review of their work. This was a critique session, and she had selected me to review her submission. It is an anxious time for conferees. They fear negative comments and long for a word that gives them hope that publication might be in their future. I was happy to tell the woman that she had “the chops” to be a writer.

That woman was Lori Roeleveld, and you hold her third book in your hand. If you haven’t already noticed, I was right. Lori has what it takes to write books—meaningful, God-centered books.

It takes more than technique to pen a book such as *Jesus and the Beanstalk*. It takes knowledge, a love for the subject, a love for the reader, and a willingness to draw lessons from personal experiences. It is this kind of book that makes the world of writing noble and meaningful. This is more than just a book. It is a conduit to a better, more meaningful Christian walk. The pressure to be meaningful in a world filled with distracting noise is especially necessary on Christian subjects.

Jesus and the Beanstalk is crafted to touch mind, heart, and soul. It has no lesser goal than to remind all believers that they are giant-killers. In an age when there are many new and frightening affronts to people of faith, there is no

ONCE UPON A FOREWORD

better time to be reminded that giants can be felled by faith and determination.

Lori reminds us that there have always been such giants in the lives of Christians, and those giants are not going away any time soon. It is a much-needed message, and readers may, by reading this text, find more steel in their spiritual spines. Lori does this without preaching. She does not occupy a pulpit, nor does she teach from an ivory tower. Instead she walks the same trail as we all do. She does not take a position at the rear of the pack to push us forward, nor does she lead us from the front by pulling us like dogs on a leash. No, she takes her position at the side of the reader and says, “Here is what I know; here is what I’ve learned; here is why I have confidence in you.”

We need theologians to plumb the depths of the Bible and to clarify doctrine. We need preachers to open the Book for daily living and show us the way of worship. But often what we need most is a compatriot, a fellow pilgrim on the road with enough scars to prove, “I have walked this path before.”

There is help in this book. There is encouragement. There is motivation. And there is a steady message that God makes all things possible—even in the twenty-first century. There are no sermons in this book, but there is wisdom presented clearly and faithfully. Each chapter offers stones we can use to slay the giants around us as the boy who would be king, David, used to slay Goliath. This makes the book not only devotional and educational but also practical in a fresh and new way.

Lori has, in her ever engaging way, given us something to think about and the kind of encouragement that helps us move forward in the living out of our faith. Using the well-known children’s tale “Jack and the Beanstalk” as a backdrop and grounding all of her teaching in a faithful reading of the Bible, Lori takes us on an adventure of thought and faith until we reach a new and stronger determination to defeat the giants that assault our daily lives.

Lori Roeleveld has done us and the kingdom of God a great favor—as you are about to find out.

Alton Gansky
award-winning author of more than 35 books

WHY ATHEISTS FEAR FAIRY TALES

Is it dangerous to read children fairy tales? This is the question inspired by statements made by leading atheist, author, and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins.¹ In a 2014 interview, Dawkins linked a diet of fairy tales with religious beliefs and a rejection of science. Dawkins later retracted his statement and launched a campaign in favor of imagination, but the initial article sparked a rich conversation, especially in a time when many skeptics would say the Christian faith is based on “fairy tales.”

There is a connection between faith and fairy tales, but it has nothing to do with rejecting facts and everything to do with having eyes that seek eternal truths. Dawkins was on to something with his original comment. Atheists are right to fear fairy tales. Stories are powerful agents of change. After all, what motivates you to apply God’s Word in a meaningful and effective way? Jesus knew that, for most of us, it is story.

Tell us the truth that God is good all the time and we have a fact for our files, a verse to commit to memory, a peg on which to hang our hopes. But tell us an epic story in which a girl encounters a series of trials, a strong, evil opponent, and the temptation to doubt the goodness of God yet still prevails, and we now have material with which our souls can fashion wings. When this everyday hero holds tight to truth and gives flesh to the fact of trusting God’s goodness, she inspires us to live a greater story within our own.

WHY ATHEISTS FEAR FAIRY TALES

False gods are mute. Idols are silent. No one ever received poetry or parables from a statue, a bank account, or a test tube. The living God is a communicator. When he wanted to reach us, he didn't send a digital readout, a lab report, or a thesis on his attributes.

Instead, he told his story through Jesus and showed us how our story intersects with his. He chronicled history, yes, and he recorded facts, it's true; but he also employed parable, irony, word pictures, humor, biography, and prophetic revelation. In addition, he created the heavens and the earth, painted with a lavish, extravagant, artistic hand.

He reaches out to us in every way. Of course, he speaks through the sciences and math. He speaks through dance, films, plays, novels, and arias. God displays a particular passion, though, for story.

He hard-wired us to receive life-changing truth through stories. Songs, films, books, photos, and art that tell stories transport us to his eternal campfire beneath the uncountable stars where he is every hero, every great father, every searchlight, every breathtaking plot twist, and every ending that is simultaneously unexpected and yet inevitable. You just know he enjoys a cliffhanger.

Facts ground us, give us footing, and secure us in place, but stories lift our eyes to meet his gaze. They remind us of our former glory that was lost but is ours again through Jesus.

Once upon a time, there was a perfect God. He created a people to love, placing them in a world he designed only for them. An evil one, seeking to rob God of his joy, tempted them. They chose to rebel against the one who loved them perfectly. The evil one, though, underestimated God's love and inventiveness. God devised a plan to redeem his fallen creation, a way to restore us to relationship with him and to reclaim even creation from the certain condemnation awaiting the tempter.

This story of a love strong enough to sacrifice everything is so rich and glorious it demands we tell it a thousand different ways. This story cries out through creation, through God's written Word, through his living Word, Jesus, and through the expressed imagination of all humanity.

WHY ATHEISTS FEAR FAIRY TALES

This world will one day pass away along with all the fossil records, calculators, and evolutionary diagrams. Only what's true will remain, and we'll celebrate these truths on the other side. Our stories will survive into eternity. We'll tell them and create new ones forever.

Fairy tales serve a purpose for all ages. My little ones shivered when they heard tales of children in dark forests encountering evil witches, but this instilled in them the truth that evil exists, is powerful, and needs to be overcome. As teenagers, they cheered on Neo, Frodo, and Luke Skywalker, identifying on a soul-affecting level with a solitary hero who remains true even when the world is in upheaval. Moreover, when Thor and Loki wrestle for power and Thor chooses to deny himself for the greater good, my grown-up heart remembers I'm part of a larger story. I'm inspired to deny myself for the sake of honoring my Father and loving others.

Yes, I learn these truths through God's Word. Still, I figure out how to live them through stories because my life is my story and my story is a single thread woven into his epic tapestry.

Atheists fear fairy tales because fairy tales remind mere mortals we aren't the sum of our cells or the weight of our water and DNA. We're not destined for dust, nor did we emerge from goo. We're God-breathed. He ransomed us. We shine like stars in the universe. Our bodies house souls that will soar through the heavens one day if we respond to the call of Jesus Christ.

We are those who will one day walk again with God.

When we do, we'll sing, recite poems, laugh, and weave endless tales. So light the fire, pull up a chair, and let me tell you a story about Jesus and the Beanstalk. Once upon a time, there was a land full of giants. . . .

PART 1

JESUS AND THE BEANSTALK

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. He removes any of my branches that don't produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit.

John 15:1-2

Part 1 introduces the pathway to effective and fruitful Christian living as described in 2 Peter 1:1-10 and explores how “Jack and the Beanstalk” can help us apply this passage to our lives.

1

LIVING IN A LAND OF GIANTS

We live in a world populated with giants.
Giant obstacles to true faith.

Giant barriers to godly lives.

Giant strongholds of sin—in our lives and the lives of loved ones or neighbors. Giant worries. Giant fears. Giant problems such as human trafficking, political corruption, racial division, raising pure children, what to serve for dinner tonight.

So even when we come to Christ, even when we know and love Jesus, even when we know his Word, worship with his people, and pray—we still live in a land populated with giants, and in comparison, we don't stand a chance.

Or do we?

Up Against Giants

In my forties, I studied karate. I was new at it, but I'm competitive. I entered my first tournament as a lowly orange belt. I won first place in two divisions: kata (a series of choreographed moves) and weapons. With only the sparring division left, I felt confident. Sparring occurs when two opponents don protective gear and score points by throwing kicks and punches at each other, making contact without intent to injure. It was in that division I encountered a giant.

I entered the ring for my bout and turned to talk with other students as

JESUS AND THE BEANSTALK

I waited for my opponent. When the warning bell rang and I whirled to face her, I was looking square into her belly button. I stood opposite an unnaturally tall, refrigerator-shaped, twenty-five-year-old farmwoman, looking as if she'd trained by hauling small tractors at the county fair. At that precise moment, I lost the bout.

I don't recall much about the actual match except I never moved. I could hear my karate teacher shout, "Do something! Anything! Aw!" It was over with breathtaking speed. Technically my opponent won, but really, I defeated myself the second I contemplated her navel.

Flash forward two years. I faced another giant in a similar karate tournament. I had two more years of training, but I was still outmatched. Again, I opposed a woman who was more skilled, younger, and in better shape. She exuded confidence. But one weapon I'd learned to engage was my mind.

It was clear this girl believed I was no match for her. I might not have been if she'd been prepared for me to come at her like a middle-aged female spinoff of Jackie Chan. I caught her completely off guard by displaying no fear and blitzing her the moment the bell rang. Without hesitation I attacked. I scored two points, and she was so rattled, I managed to sneak in a third to win the match within seconds. There I stood, still the lesser fighter, but now the victor. What changed between my first match and my second is this time I had refused to defeat myself. I might be out-skilled. I might fight out of my league. I might still go down, but I will no longer do the work for my opponents.

We Christians do that though, don't we? In a land of giants, too often we spend so much time contemplating our opponents and weighing the odds, we defeat ourselves. Let me save you some time. The odds are always in favor of the giant—always—but odds don't win battles. Ask David.

God's Word says there are giant forces of evil at work in this age. In Matthew 13, Jesus gave us the parable of the sower and told us the evil one will carry off some of the seed planted in peoples' hearts. In the following parable, he describes an enemy who plants weeds among the good seed in a farmer's field under cover of dark. These stories speak to a relentless, invasive enemy at

LIVING IN A LAND OF GIANTS

work in our midst. Battling such pervasive evil will require diligent persistence on our part. There's nothing easy involved in what we're about these days. We face aggressive, abominable giants. We will surely be defeated if we do their work for them!

I hear what you're thinking: we have to face reality. Living in a land populated by giants, we are small, outmatched opponents. That is a fact, the powerful truth. All right, I'll give you that.

Individually we're puny compared to the evil giants at large. Even when we combine forces, we're still small compared to the truly big forces of darkness. Working together can sometimes produce (short-term) a promising start on a magnificent tower, but it doesn't take long for it all to dissolve to babble. Even on our good days, we struggle to get along and stay out of our own way. Not to mention we're frail, sinful, and limited. We mess up. We get sick. We tire. We die. How can we hope to defeat giants?

God Loves Small

There's good news in this too, though, because God loves small. That's right. The great God of the universe is passionate about working small. Consider the biblical proof of this fact.

First, there's a mysterious little verse in Zechariah 4:10: "For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. 'These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth'" (ESV). Now Zechariah was looking at more extensive issues with this verse than our individual consolation when opposing giants. But the sense of it is a warning to beware of writing something off because it starts small. God repeats this theme in numerous Bible stories, so many we can't ignore the truth that Scripture as a whole testifies to God's love of working small.

God didn't make Gideon's army bigger before leading them into battle; he made it smaller (Judges 7). King David was the youngest, the runt of Jesse's litter of sons, but God chose him to succeed Saul as king (1 Samuel 16:1-13).

JESUS AND THE BEANSTALK

The Israelites started as a puny, seemingly inconsequential tribe, a fact God relished repeating to them (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). Zacchaeus was so small he had to climb a tree to see Jesus, and yet Jesus singled him out for the gift of his presence (Luke 19:1-10). Five loaves and two fishes were a small offering for thousands of hungry people, and yet, in Jesus's hands, it became an abundant feast (Matthew 14:13-21). Bethlehem is a small city in which to be born (Micah 5:2), and Nazareth was a no-account place to be from, like every other Podunk town from which a person can hail (John 1:46). Yet God chose to grace them with his glory.

One key to facing giants is understanding that God revels in using small people, places, tribes, and churches because, through them, he reveals even more of his glory. Isn't that the point? Not to draw attention to great men, women, tribes, and nations but to draw attention to the Creator God and his plan of redemption.

Small Acts Can Have Big Impact

Imagine a writer coming from a small village in the smallest state and hoping to be of any use in furthering the kingdom of God. How would such a small-town girl even think God might notice her and use her for his glory? Yet God has given even this minor author great stories to tell.

When I started blogging, I knew my friends read my work, along with my family. After several months, my readership grew to about thirty readers a day. It didn't get much higher for years except for occasional flurries of activity. Even now, I don't have a large readership compared to those of major bloggers. When I petition the heavens about this and slip my complaint into God's suggestion box, he whispers a reminder: I don't have to be big to be of use to him. Sometimes I pout about that because, boy, those big numbers come in pretty handy down here. But I'm learning to see things from his perspective.

For example, God sometimes uses my small blog to affect others whose numbers are more impressive. Best-selling authors, filmmakers, and bloggers with greater audiences have read my posts and let me know a post influenced

LIVING IN A LAND OF GIANTS

them. In this way, God multiplies the impact of my small blog, as he multiplied the impact of Ananias.

Ananias understood feeling small. We don't read much about him in Scripture. Several short verses in Acts 9 describe how he received instructions from God to go to "Judas' house on Straight Street" and lay hands on a certain man (v. 11). Ananias was understandably daunted because he knew the man God sent him to heal was aggressively persecuting followers of Jesus. Out of obedience, Ananias went to Saul, laid hands on him, and influenced the man who would become the apostle Paul. Ananias had to affect only one person in order to have a part in changing the world. If we embrace this truth, it will free us to find the courage to obey when God sends us to our Straight Street.

One night, a blogger in Aurora, Colorado, with a (then) small audience, commented on a post I wrote that she was thinking of giving up writing. Afterward, she attended a movie with her teenage daughters. They were sitting in theater 9 to see *The Dark Knight Rises* when James Eagan Holmes shot into the crowd. Ironically, my post had been about how some people will always choose evil. The next day, this woman wrote a post about God's protection—a post that went viral. Although up until then she'd had only a few readers, hundreds of thousands read this post. We never know the day God will hand us the story he wants to reach many, so we must remain faithful to the everyday few.

God further illustrated the nonissue of my small beginning in March of 2014. I wrote a post about a news report that the government of North Korea had sentenced a group of Christians to execution. My post explored the question of what difference their deaths would make to us in the West. How would we live differently knowing North Korean believers face prison, torture, and death? I posted the essay, sent the e-mail out to my modest group of followers, and went on with my day.

That evening, I chatted online with another author while I checked my blog numbers for the day. "That's funny," I messaged Aaron, "a post I wrote today had over three thousand views. Wow, I've never had that happen!"

We continued chatting, and Aaron urged me to check the stats again.

JESUS AND THE BEANSTALK

“Guess what,” I responded. “It’s up to eight thousand views. What’s going on?”

God taught me a lesson that day about what he can do when he wants a message to fly. Over the next three days, readers viewed that post over one million times, and today, people are still reading it. Several months later, readers shared one of my posts so many times it went viral over Facebook. The numbers of readers for those posts defy their starting place. No one who knew my daily following would have predicted that any single post could reach that wide of an audience, but God loves to reveal himself by using those of us who are small in big ways. If he can use this little-known writer, he can use you, loved one.

We live in a land populated by giants to which we are small in comparison, but God loves taking what is small and glorifying himself through smallness. Who dares despise the day of small things? Not I. When I’m tempted to despise my smallness, I resist because I know my size isn’t what matters. God’s vision of me is the only important thing.

There’s a second reason we have every reason to hope even though we live in a land of giants: we come from a long line of giant-killers. We’ll explore that truth in the next chapter.

Small Steps Toward Slaying Giants

1. List the giants in your life. List the problems, people, habits, and barriers overwhelming you. Then add the giants you wouldn't even imagine you could take on—maybe diabetes, racial reconciliation, or human trafficking. What feelings surface as you compile this list?
2. Read the story of Gideon in Judges 6–7, taking special note of Judges 7:2. Why is it good for us, as well as for God's glory, for God to work using those of us who are small?
3. Keep track this week of all the times you feel incapable, insignificant, or as if you will never make a difference. What would happen next week if each time you felt that way, you thanked God that he sees you, praised him for his greatness, and intentionally focused on his power instead of your own limitations?
4. Look at the list of giants you've compiled. Is any one of those too great for God? After you read the name of each giant, read 1 John 4:4. Ask God for the faith to believe, in a life-altering way, what he says in that verse.



One Stone for Your Sling: The odds are always in favor of the giant—always—but odds don't win battles. Ask David.