

SOUL CITY CHURCH

“Let the people redeemed by God tell their story...”

Psalm 107:2

You are a story. You are not merely the possessor and teller of a number of stories; you are a well-written, intentional story that is authored by the greatest Writer of all time, and even before time and after time. The weight of those words, if you believe them even for brief snippets of time, can change the trajectory of your life. In fact, those words will call you to a level of coauthorship that is staggering in its scope and meaning.

- To be told, Dan Allender -

What your life reveals

1. God is not merely the Creator of our life. He is also the Author of our life, and he writes each person's life to reveal his divine story.
2. Your life is not a series of random scenes. Your story has unique characters, surprising plot twists, central themes, tension, suspense, and deep significance.
3. When I study and understand my life story, I can join God as a coauthor. I don't have to settle for merely being a reader of my life; God calls me to be a writer of my future.
4. There is a necessity and blessing of telling our story to others.

Writing your story

The Lifemap is simply a tool, a framework within which to explore the many different factors that have shaped who and where you are today. In many ways these factors powerfully influence the way we feel, how we relate to others (including God), and how we interpret and even experience the ways others relate to us.

1. Get Supplies

- Get 2 stacks of small or medium size Post-It notes – each stack of a different color (i.e., 1 of yellow Post-It notes and the other of blue Post-It notes).
- Taping sheets of cardstock paper or manila folders or even using a journal works as the background.

2. Brainstorm

Start the Lifemap Exercise by just Brainstorming About Your Life History:

- Take the pad of yellow Post-It notes and brainstorm on the people, places and events that have shaped your life (write only one of these per post-it note). Jot down just a few words on each post-it note to capture the idea. Let the ideas flow as a stream of consciousness...

(Note: At this point, don't worry about any particular order or sequence, just sit down with the stack of yellow Post-It notes and try to get as many as possible out; especially those in your younger years – which may be less easily remembered, but also the most influential in shaping you.)

Helpful questions to ponder

What might you share about yourself to a friendly stranger on a long plane ride?

- People
- Places (i.e., geographic locations, houses lived in, etc.)
- Events (include any before you were born that significantly shaped the emotional, relational environment you were born into)
- Education, Job's, Ministries, Hobbies and Interests
- Your Process of Salvation

What would you share about yourself with a dear and trusted friend?

- Successes – what has delighted you the most in your life?
- Failures – what has disappointed you the most in your life?
- Were there major personality, mood, relational shifts in you at any point?

On these next two, think of those things you have done as well as those things that have happened to you or around you:

- Joys - what have been the people, places or events in your life that have been most positive and/or about which you are most proud/happy when you recall them?
- Sorrows – what have been your deepest hurt(s) and disappointments?

3. Look for the Sequence

Arrange the notes in a logical sequence in the columns of the big sheet. Most people arrange their notes in chronological order from left to right, some using different columns by segments in school or life stages, or different addresses or cities they lived in, etc. But you can do it in whatever order or segments feels most natural for arranging your story.

Use the pad of different colored post-it notes to highlight the painful people, places and events. Transfer the words/names/events on the original painful yellow note to one that is of a different color. This causes the groupings or stages of your life with more pleasant or painful notes to stand out from each other.

Take your time and add additional notes of the appropriate color (for negative or positive, pleasant or painful) as you recall other people, places and events.

4. Look for Clues as to God's Calling in your Life!

Look back over your emerging timeline for patterns or themes. Ask God to reveal to you, now as you are 'retrospectively curious' in looking at your life so far, what He was establishing in your life, even before you came to know Him:

- What patterns do you see in the personal inclinations, pivotal decisions, unique opportunities and transforming experiences of your history?
- What was God uniquely preparing you for, even in painful experiences? Remember, God doesn't waste experiences in our lives. In short, what has God 'called' you to in your life?

5. Reflect on each column of notes in turn.

Pay attention especially to the colored painful notes. See if you can pinpoint one, two or three (or more) Deep Beliefs that were forged during that portion of your life?

Pay special attention to the values forged in the crucible of the painful events? When painful things happen, it is very human to believe a lie ("It must have been my fault that my childhood abuser did that to me.") or to make a 'vow' ("That hurt so much, I will never allow that to happen again!"). These lies and/or vows, become unconscious, but powerful guides to our behavior, becoming the often-unexamined Deep Beliefs about ourselves, others, life, God, relationships, etc.

NOTE:

Cognitive Beliefs or Biblical Truths are taught,

Deep Beliefs are most often caught (watching other people, especially our parents) and bought in painful experiences, especially at early ages where we are most impressionable.

Hence, believers can be living lives that violate their sincerely held beliefs and convictions because they have never confronted and disarmed the power of their personal Deep Beliefs.

6. Prepare to Tell your Story:

There is power in story: story has long been the primary conveyor of history and shaper of values in every culture of the world – and whether we are aware of it or not, this has been very true in each of our lives - thus the value of laying it out and looking for patterns and themes...

- Stories engage the heart, emotions and imagination, not just the mind.
- All of life is experienced as a story, we are shaped by the stories we live, whether we take the time to understand them or not. That's why God gave us the Bible in a story format – He could have just given us a long treatise on Systematic Theology, but He didn't.
- It can bring brokenness and true repentance: Facing our deepest hurts and disappointments in life can lead to the 'poverty of spirit' that is the foundation of all true change. We can face our pains; forgive those who have hurt us; forgive God for having allowed it to happen; and repent of our self-centered attempts to use this pain as an excuse to not love God

and others well.

- It clarifies vision and calling: God was laying sovereign foundations in our lives even before we knew Him personally. Ephesians 2:10 says that we are 'His workmanship - His poem or work of art.' He has a plan for our lives; a unique calling that He wants us to fulfill. Reflecting prayerfully on our lives helps us to discern His threads in the tapestry of our unique designs.

How to Tell your Story?

Think of a 'pearl necklace' analogy as you outline your story:

- The basic chronology of your story is like the string of a pearl necklace; the string is essential to tying things together, but it's not the heart of the matter. It's easy to fall into excessive focus on the chronology or 'logistical' details, and you don't ever get around to the pearls - those significant shaping moments or patterns that you experienced and reacted to by protecting yourself from rejection or abandonment, adapting who you were to get the most attention or acceptance you could or surrendered to God in despair of being able to make it work yourself.
- The pearls of the necklace are those significant/momentous times; important times when core lessons and beliefs were learned; when you encountered God afresh; painful experiences when crucial vows or key decisions were probably made. These are those parts of your story that shed insight as to who you really are; the calling that God has for your life and the barriers to faith that you'll need to trust God to overcome if you are to become who you really are and fulfill His unique reason for creating you.

Remember, you are doing this in Grace, so don't compare yourself to anyone else:

- There is no right or wrong way to tell your story
- You have total freedom to be only as transparent and vulnerable as you feel comfortable being
- Try to step out of your comfort zone
- Don't compare yourself to others. You have to be true to who God has made you. This is your story you are telling, not someone else's.
- Try to have fun preparing and telling your story. Don't worry about having it perfect or having to impress anyone else

* Much of the content from above is from Dan Allender & Nathan Shattuck