

Gary Heim and Lisa Heim

Do You Know Your True Identity?



TELLING  
OUR  
STORIES

Know Your Story. Embrace the Truth.



# Introduction

**W**elcome to this study guide. We're delighted that you're here.

Telling our stories means acknowledging the lies we've believed and how they influence the ways we relate to God, ourselves, and others. Most important, it means embracing the truth of who we are in Christ so we can become grateful, giving, children of God in the midst of this broken world. The purpose for writing and telling our story is to help us see more clearly how to make Jesus Christ the center of our lives so we can love God and others wholeheartedly.

Writing your life story can be done individually or as a small group. This process can be helpful for married couples too. This guide presents one way to tell our stories. It is not the only way, but it has proven to be quite effective in getting to core lies and truths. We hope you will find it helpful.

We recommend that you complete this material in one setting. Read through the top half of page 7 and stop to discuss questions or comments you have up to that point. Then finish reading the remaining pages. If you're doing this with your small group or spouse, read it out loud together. Be willing to stop along the way for any discussion that could be helpful.

Before you begin, pray together. Ask God to speak to you as you write and tell your story.



# Why We Tell Our Life Stories

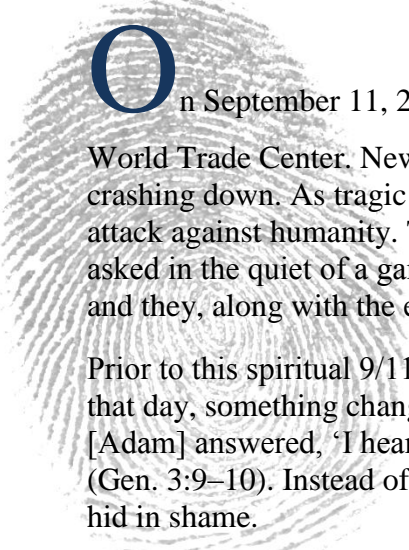
**T**hrough history, God is telling his story of redemption. He tells part of his story through *your* life. God loves stories. Seventy-three percent of the Bible is written in story rather than proposition. Stories touch our souls in ways that principles cannot. God shows us how to walk with him through the real-life dramas of men and women who struggled with fear, failure, doubt, faith, love, and courage just like you and me. The apostle John tells why he shares his story: “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete” (1 John 1:3–4). In the same way, we write and share our stories to proclaim what we have seen and heard about God’s faithfulness and redemption in our lives.

And we share our stories in order to know how to help each other grow toward full devotion in Jesus. Inviting one another into fellowship with the Father, with his Son, and with the Holy Spirit makes our joy complete; our lives have true significance. To serve one another in this way requires that we know where we struggle, what lies we believe, and how they take us south. Thus, we can know how to pray and speak truth in love, encouraging one another to go north. Instead of just praying for Aunt Lucy’s foot surgery or for traveling mercies on our vacation (though these prayers matter), we can go deeper and let one another know how we’re being tempted to go south and grasp for relief. We’re at war between good and evil. We believe either the truth or lies about where our security and significance are found. We go either to God or gods. Every day all day, we choose north or south. Let’s not fight this battle alone!





# Coming Out of Hiding



**O**n September 11, 2001, evil showed its face. Flight 11 and Flight 175 slammed into the World Trade Center. New York City was rocked to its foundations as the Twin Towers came crashing down. As tragic as that day was in American history, 9/11 was not the worst terrorist attack against humanity. The most tragic attack came by way of a simple, theological question asked in the quiet of a garden. The Serpent asked, “Can God be trusted?” Adam and Eve said no, and they, along with the entire human race, came crashing down (Gen. 3:1–7).

Prior to this spiritual 9/11, the sound of God’s footsteps filled Adam and Eve with joy. But after that day, something changed. Genesis says, “the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ [Adam] answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid’” (Gen. 3:9–10). Instead of running toward God, Adam and Eve fled in terror. They cowered; they hid in shame.

That’s the legacy of the Fall. We live with a terror of being known because we fear that the shame of our inner nakedness will be seen. We know something’s wrong with us. We hide from God, and we hide from each other. We grasp for safety in thousands of overt and subtle ways: being passive, passing the blame, staying busy, being tough, being shy, the list goes on. Left to ourselves, we survive by faking it. We pretend we’ve got it together. We work to manage and control people by keeping them at a distance. In one way or another, everybody lives like Adam and Eve. Three dynamics describe how fallen people relate: We’re *afraid*. Why? Because we’re *naked*. Therefore, we *hide*.

But God comes looking for us. He seeks us out just as he sought Adam: “Adam, where are you?” God knows everything; he asked that question for Adam’s sake. For our sake, God asks, “Where are you? Will you trust me? Will you come out and be known? My heart overflows with love for you. I’ve come to help you, not harm you.” But like Adam, we reflexively, foolishly, and stubbornly believe our life depends on hiding instead of trusting God’s grace. John Ortberg has said, “Our tendency since the Fall is to hide as if our life depended on it. This is exactly wrong. Our life depends on getting found. *There is no healing in hiding.*”<sup>1</sup> God’s help comes by way of being known. So he continually invites us to come to him by asking, “Where are you?”

<sup>1</sup> John Ortberg, *Everybody’s Normal Till You Get to Know Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003),

82. Emphasis in original.



## Being known sinners

There's a story in the Bible about a woman who had a reputation for being a prostitute (Luke 7:36–50). She was a known “sinner.” Jesus knew *everything* about her. And she knew he had forgiven her. She knew he loved her. The affections of her heart spilled over in extravagant, gift-giving gratitude.

We must become known sinners if we want to worship God like that dear lady. We've all prostituted ourselves with the world. When we're fully known and we know we're forgiven and loved with all our failures and faults, we'll worship Jesus. Obeying Jesus will be a *get to*—not a *have to*. Being known means we come out of hiding and open our lives up to God. That happens by way of letting trusted people know our struggles, wounds, lies, and secrets. It means trusting each other enough to stop pretending we have it together. We must become the fellowship of the broken. True community is a place of safety where our walls come down; where our lies, sins, weaknesses, and inabilities are disclosed; and where we are fully accepted. This is where life in Christ can flourish. It doesn't matter how smart and talented we are, how ugly or good-looking we are, how popular or unwanted we are, or how much money we have or don't have. We must become known sinners together.

The irony of the masks is that although we wear them to make other people think well of us, they are drawn to us only when we take them off.

**John Ortberg**, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*

We're all haunted by disappointments, wounds, and desperate longings to be accepted. We want to belong, to know we're not alone in our brokenness and shame. In true, spiritual community, people see the mess, but they see something more. They see and celebrate the life of Christ that stirs beneath—no matter how big the mess may be. The gospel is all about forgiveness, acceptance, and delight. When the prodigal came home, his father partied. He danced and sang (Luke 15:11–32). We need to see the Father dance for us. We need to hear him sing over us when we “come home” by way of humble honesty and confession. That's, in part, the power of life-changing community, as Larry Crabb explained:



In a spiritual community, people reach deep places in each other's hearts that are not often or easily reached. . . . They openly express love and reveal fear, even though they *feel* so unaccustomed to that level of intimacy.

When members of a spiritual community reach a sacred place of vulnerability and authenticity, something is released. . . . An appetite for holy things is stirred. For just a moment, the longing to know God becomes intense, stronger than all other passions, worth whatever price must be paid for it. . . . *Togetherness* in Christ encourages *movement* toward Christ.<sup>2</sup>

### **How do you feel about coming out of hiding and allowing yourself to be fully known by God and a few trusted others?**

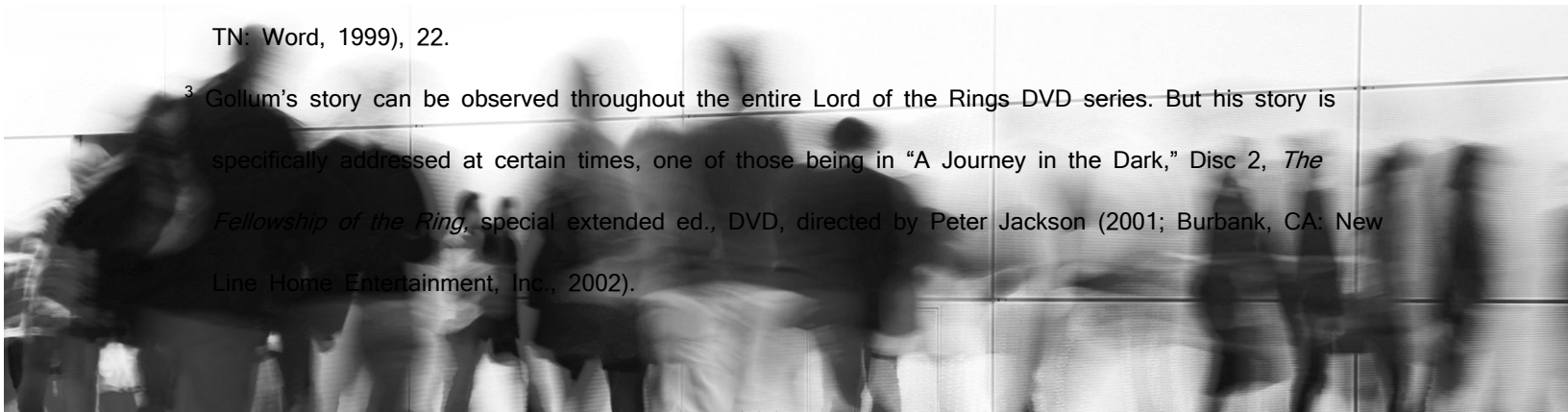

## Being known is not optional

If we want to make Jesus Christ the treasure and ruling passion of our lives, we must have a safe place where we can talk about anything and everything that gets in the way of our wholehearted devotion to him. We can't become wholehearted followers of Jesus while hiding secrets and cowering in fear or shame. "Confess your sins to each other," James tells us, ". . . that you may be healed" (James 5:16). Secrets haunt us. They drain our heart's passion. Hiding breeds loneliness and shame. Our Enemy hammers us with accusations such as, "If you tell anyone this secret, you'll be condemned. People will be so hurt and disappointed in you. Hide. Take it to your grave." Our loneliness begs for relief, making us vulnerable to further temptation. Our fallen nature, our Enemy, and our culture offer a warehouse of immoral options: have an affair, click on a porn site, masturbate to a fantasy, eat a couple more doughnuts and loath yourself in the mirror, have a couple more drinks, yell at your loved one, buy one more toy you can't afford to impress people you don't care about. It's insanity. Our lusts rise to a fever pitch. Our sense of emptiness and despair deepens. We become like wretched Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, hating yet clinging to our "precious" that is destroying our lives.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth: Where People Connect and are Forever Changed* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1999), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Gollum's story can be observed throughout the entire Lord of the Rings DVD series. But his story is specifically addressed at certain times, one of those being in "A Journey in the Dark," Disc 2, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, special extended ed., DVD, directed by Peter Jackson (2001; Burbank, CA: New Line Home Entertainment, Inc., 2002).



He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone.

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, *Life Together*

Perhaps you don't harbor secrets such as sexual perversion, looking at porn, having had an abortion or an affair, but we all struggle with failure and sin. We're all in the same boat. And we can only be loved to the extent we are known. When we keep our struggles or secrets to ourselves, our self-talk sounds something like this: "Yeah. You say you like me, but if you really knew me, you'd reject me." Having secrets and hiding from others destroy intimacy with God and with each other, driving a wedge of fear and shame between a husband and wife, friends, or small-group members. We can never be one with God and others till we take off our masks. We'll only do that when we get sick and tired of our dark, inner world. We must be so desperate for God that we take the risk of being known no matter how people may respond. Until then, we'll never know God deeply. We'll never be the man or woman God dreams for us to be.

God uses honest, broken people to heal broken people. Servants of Christ lead from their brokenness. That's God's way. Henry Cloud explained how the honesty and brokenness of their group leader helped him open up and grow during his college years:

The group was an informal combination of Bible study, discussion, and life sharing. . . . Dan, the facilitator, was a warm, personable student a couple of years older than the rest of us. I was drawn by his attitude and maturity. One night, however, he started the group by saying, "Hey, I am really struggling with lust and sexual temptation, and I need to let you guys know what is going on so you can help me and pray for me." As he talked about the struggle, a chain reaction occurred; the rest of us started chiming in about how tough the sexual purity battle was for us, too.

This may be normal for your group, but for me it was world shattering. It was my first experience of sane, healthy, open discussion with other guys about sex. . . . That night Dan helped us open up our lives, hearts, and emotions. I came away pretty shaken up inside, but in a good way. I felt connected to the other guys in a way I had never experienced before. It was as if deeper parts of me had a place to go, where we were all the same.

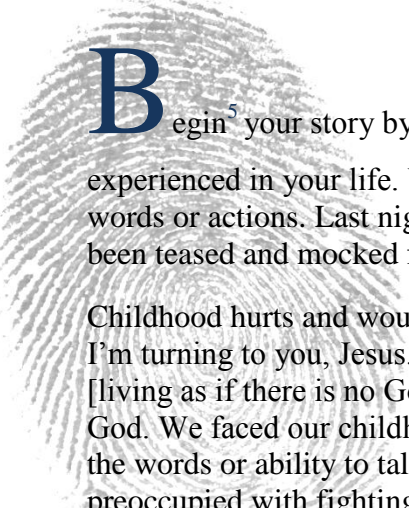
. . . The people and what happened there became more important to me. Something changed within me. Though I still got . . . spiritual growth, learning, friendship—I began receiving another spiritual benefit I hadn't signed up for. That surprising benefit was the possibility of being connected, heart and soul, to God and others without having to edit, pretend, or hold back.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 56-57.





# Writing Your Life Story



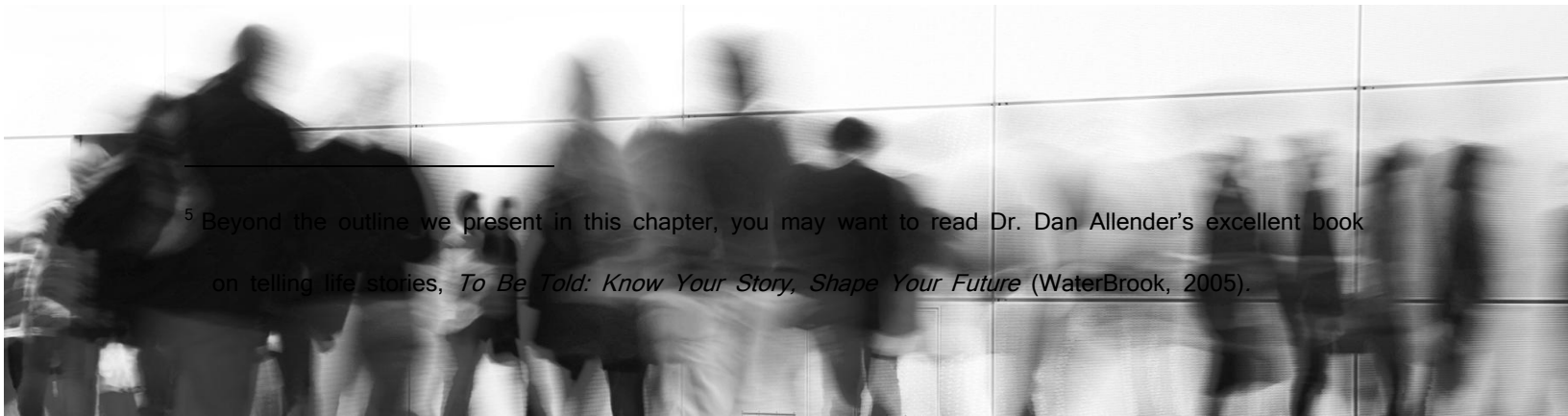
**B**egin<sup>5</sup> your story by thinking back over some of the disappointments and wounds you've experienced in your life. We've all been frustrated, disappointed, hurt, or wounded by someone's words or actions. Last night the news reported on a high school girl who hung herself. She had been teased and mocked for months by her classmates.

Childhood hurts and wounds run deep. No little kid thinks, "I feel so alone and unwanted, but I'm turning to you, Jesus. You are my refuge and strength!" Proverbs tells us that "foolishness [living as if there is no God] is bound up in the heart of a child" (22:15 NASB). We didn't turn to God. We faced our childhood disappointments, hurts, and wounds alone. Most of us didn't have the words or ability to talk about them with our parents or teachers, and most of those adults—preoccupied with fighting their own wounds and lies—never thought to ask. But in the fires of childhood rejection, abuse, and failure, we make life-changing decisions. Without realizing it, we decide what kind of person we have to become in order to make life work. We pretend and pose. We grasp for acceptance. We work to avoid rejection. We fear people more than God. No one's exempt. We go toward being aggressive, tough, and angry, or passive, needy, and fearful. Tough and aggressive men and women usually grew up in relationally cold or distant homes. Those characterized by neediness were most often overindulged.

This is not about blaming others or avoiding responsibility for our actions or choices in life. But if we don't face our disappointments and wounds and the lies they've fostered, they will influence the way we see God, ourselves, and others. We will sin by going south into self-protective behavior. Our insecurities will take us south into grasping for control of situations that feel similar and threaten to expose or reject us. We'll live for something other than loving God and loving others.

For example, due to multiple ear infections, I missed nearly half of the third grade. My teacher counseled my parents to hold me back. I was devastated. I worked hard to hide the shame of that "failure" for many years. This painful event was one of many events in my life story that "named me," telling me I was a stupid failure. Other wounds and lies have also shaped my personality. When I played softball at recess, I usually struck out. I was always picked last. Team captains fought over me.

"You can have Heim."



<sup>5</sup> Beyond the outline we present in this chapter, you may want to read Dr. Dan Allender's excellent book on telling life stories, *To Be Told: Know Your Story, Shape Your Future* (WaterBrook, 2005).



“Nope. I don’t need him. I’ve got the guys I want. He’s yours.”

The message was clear: no one wants a strikeout. And so the shame of striking out and being picked last fostered and fueled a lie in me. Without realizing it, I began to define *life* as getting people to pick me. I defined *death* as having others see my inadequacies and reject me. People’s approval based on my performance became the false god I worshiped and served. I succumbed to the daily pressure of performance and the daily terror of shame and failure. In those days I had no category for understanding how Jesus’ love could be my security. I needed to please and impress people if I had any chance of being anyone to anybody.

Moreover, because I believed “stupid failure” and “strikeout” were my names or true identity, I made a vow without even realizing it. I determined to avoid anything that could make me feel like a stupid failure or strikeout again. Instead of dealing with problems, I avoided them through passivity; I pursued what I was good at and avoided whatever threatened to expose my inadequacies. I was committed to my own safety and survival. I was living a self-centered life.

Wounds and disappointments come in all shapes and sizes. Maybe you were hurt by something someone said to you on the playground at recess like Lisa was: “Are those corrective shoes?” It was not only the words that hurt but the mocking laughter Lisa heard as the girls ran away. Maybe it was when someone you trusted betrayed your trust by sexually abusing you. Maybe it was when your father or mother walked out on your family. A church leader I looked up to once yelled at me saying, “You’re the most worthless hunk of humanity I’ve ever met!”



## Step one in writing your life story: Face the wounds and lies

Take some time and reflect on one of the first disappointing or wounding events you can remember in your life. Complete the following statement: **“A painful event in my life story is . . .”** As you reflect on that snapshot in time, what do you think you felt? **What did you believe about yourself as a result of that experience?**

*Note: Some people say they are not aware of being hurt or wounded in life. There are several reasons for this. Some think only in terms of big tragedies instead of common events like those mentioned earlier. The event itself isn't as important as the lie you believed as a result of it. Infectious bacteria can enter a very small cut. Other people may not be aware of hurts because it sounds weak or needy. Therefore, they resist thinking about this. Truth is, we are weak and needy. God designed us that way so we would need him. Moreover, some may not be aware of past hurts because they've never been invited to think about their lives in this way. Without putting undue pressure on yourself, write down anything that comes to mind.*

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**Reflect again on two or three other wounding events in your life. Write them down along with the one above.**

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**What did you feel and come to believe about yourself as a result of those hurts or wounds?**

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If you took all the disappointments, hurts, or wounds you've written down, along with others you can remember, and boiled them down to a word or phrase about how you see yourself, what would that word or phrase be? Some people have said things like: *Unlovable. Unwanted. Failure. Loser. Idiot. I'm on my own. I'll always screw it up. I'll never be good enough. Never chosen.*

One woman I worked with had been sexually abused as a child. As we talked through her life story, she came to realize that she lived with the false identity of thinking she was *Pond Scum*. Any time a man smiled at her or was kind to her, she instantly assumed he was seeing her as easy. She instantly felt shame and contempt for herself and the man.

As you boil down your wounding events to a word or phrase, what would you say your false name or identity is? **Write it down.**

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Look at it. Give yourself permission to grieve the pain and the weight of all the sorrow that lie has brought you. Talk honestly with God about those painful memories. It's not selfish to feel and lament the sorrow of this fallen world. It's not wrong to experience the ache of unmet longings. It's in those deep and tender places of our hearts that God longs to speak to us and meet with us. It's there he longs to be our God. He longs to be a Father to the fatherless, a husband to the widow. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you. He is the Comforter. Listen for his still, small, and gentle voice.

As we experience the pain of life, our Enemy comes to us in order to twist the knife. He accuses us and tries to name us. He says, "You're such a loser! You're all alone. You'll never succeed at



anything. You're just an idiot. You gave in again! You lost control *again*? God could never delight in someone like you!" Sadly, we choose to believe these lies and hide from God and each other instead of embracing the truth of God's unwavering and unconditional love for us. When we believe the lies about our false identity, they will influence the way we relate to God and others.

**Finish the following statements:**

The lie (false name/identity) tells me I must *always*  
if I am to be wanted, loved, or seen as competent and respectable.

The lie tells me I must *never*  
if I am to avoid rejection or the shame of failure and incompetence.

My false name or identity as a "stupid failure" and a "strikeout" tells me I must *always impress people if I'm to be wanted, loved, or seen as competent and respectable*. That lie breeds a lot of fear of failure and a lot of pressure to perform. The lie also tells me I must *always be better than anyone else if I'm to be noticed and wanted*. Finally, the lie tells me I must *never be less than someone else if I'm to avoid rejection or the shame of failure and incompetence*. Those are devilish lies. These falsehoods have stirred up a lot of jealousy and envy toward others more gifted than me. I have been like King Saul and have feared and hated all the Davids in my life (1 Sam. 18:6–11). I've harbored anger and resentment toward others who are chosen and who are better than I am at what they do. When Lisa and others have not affirmed me or when they have treated me in ways that have caused me to feel like a strikeout, I've either lashed out in anger or withdrawn into self-pitying silence.

When you believe the lies, how does your style of relating impact the people you love? Consider how those lies take you south and keep you in bondage to self-centeredness, hiding, and grasping for life. Put yourself in the shoes of those you hurt.





**What do you think it's like for them to be around you when you're choosing to believe the lies and grasp for control?**

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**How often do you think about that? How often do you consider what they long for from you?**

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**What might their false name or identify be?**

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## Step two in writing your life story: Embrace the truth

“It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for” (Eph. 1:11 MSG). The truth sets us free to be who we were meant to be. Entering our wounds and facing our lies allows us to turn from them and embrace the truth about who God is and how he sees us. This is important because we must adopt God’s image of us as our true self-image.

Michael Jordan was a gifted basketball player, and he knew it. But imagine Jordan forgot who he was. Suppose he believed he wasn’t good at basketball. Would that impact his performance on the court? Would Jordan’s doubts cause him to play differently? Of course. He wouldn’t be so eager to get into the game.



If deep down I believe I'm a strikeout, that will influence the way I relate to Lisa, my kids, and others. I won't be so eager to take risks in living for God and others. I'll be tempted to play it safe. It will influence the direction I'll choose when I face groaning and hardship. If I don't believe I have what it takes, I'll go south. I'll feel threatened and either react in anger or passively retreat into silence when I fail or when others treat me disrespectfully. If I truly believe I'm a beloved son of God, known and kept by him, I have a good chance of choosing north in the groaning of life as I interact with people, disappointment, and pain. It doesn't mean it will be easy or that I'll never fail, but I can make a choice to give life to others instead of taking it from them if I remember who defines me: God, not people.

Revisiting our life story will help us define how frustrations, disappointments, and wounds have shaped and fueled the lies we believe. More importantly, knowing our stories can help us embrace the truth about who we really are in Christ. This is foundational to helping us on our journey of becoming grateful, giving children of God. That's the life Jesus came to give us. My friend Andrea wrote me one day to tell how God is using her story for his good purposes:

*Dear Gary,*

*I have been meaning to e-mail you about a conversation I had with my mom over Thanksgiving. We were in the kitchen, cleaning up after a meal and talking about our relationships with our spouses, and I began sharing more of the material you had taught me. Mom is somewhat familiar with it because of my time counseling with you, but every so often I relate to her how I process life using your paradigm. Most of what I referred to was going "north" to Christ instead of "south" to our husbands to get our needs met, how we can truly give to them once we are abiding in Christ, and turning to the Lord for our strength instead of grasping for strength and security from our husbands. All of a sudden she got tears in her eyes. . . . She said to me: "Andrea, you are so strong." I answered gently, "The Lord is my strength and my song." I wanted her to know that I don't consider myself strong, I have just improved at turning to him for strength. She continued saying, "I always thought you were so weak; I don't know if it's because you were born early and had to be in an incubator, but I've always thought of you as 'my little Andrea' and that I needed to take care of you." I then shared with her that her view of me was the way I had seen myself my whole life, that I am incapable of doing much on my own and that I am helpless and feel the need to be rescued, very much that "little girl" mentality. To have her verbalize a comprehensive statement of my most significant "wound" was incredibly freeing, to have my own remembrance of my childhood confirmed. I then told her the "new name" God had given me from the passage in Psalm 34:5, "Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame." My dad came into the kitchen while I was saying this verse. I went on to explain how much God has used my new name (Radiant) to speak quietly to me when I feel tempted to sin and go down into self-contempt and self-pity. He has spoken my new name to me several times, reminding me that my worth and position before him is not dependent on my performance, but on the performance of his Son.*

*Hallelujah! My Dad was sitting on a stool in front of where I stood, and he was beaming with happiness for me in what I have been learning. My mom was happy too. I just hugged my dad and said tearfully, "I love the Lord Jesus."*



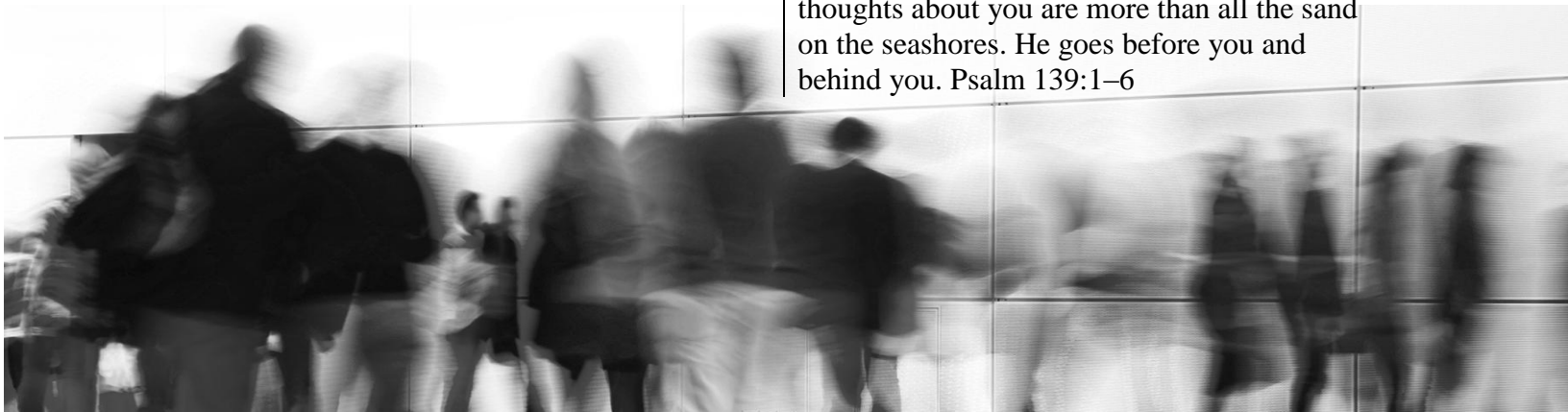
*I am so encouraged even as I write this and remember the conversation I had with my parents that I am a daughter of the King and he has claimed me as his own. This security in his love is something that has taken me so long to understand and accept, but I think I'm finally getting it. Even more exciting is how God is using my understanding of him to reach my parents with Truth.*

What do you believe Jesus would say to you right now if you could hear him speak to you? Most Christians assume they would hear some kind of advice, correction, or rebuke instead of tenderness and delight. We assume Jesus is focused on our failures. But he isn't. Listen to God's heart for his people (and for you and me) even when their sin and failure is causing God to discipline them: "Oh! Ephraim [Israel] is my dear, dear son, my child in whom I take pleasure! Every time I mention his name, my heart bursts with longing for him! Everything in me cries out for him. Softly and tenderly I wait for him." God's Decree" (Jer. 31:20 MSG).

We are God's dearly loved children (Eph. 5:1). The Bible says there is no condemnation for anyone who is in Christ (Rom. 8:1). None. Let that sink in. God never has a condemning thought toward you. As we've said before, *grace* means "unmerited favor." If you're in Christ, God favors you. He loves you. His heart is moved with compassion for you and your struggles. Read and reflect on Luke 15:3–24 to understand how God feels about you. Consider what the Good Shepherd, the woman, and the Father feel in these stories. They feel deep concern and love for that which is lost.

Here are a few more examples of the truth about how God thinks and feels about you.

<b>The Lie</b>	<b>The Truth</b>
I'm unloved and rejected.	I am a beloved child of God: 1 John 3:1; 4:10
I am unacceptable due to my performance.	I am accepted and loved because of Jesus' performance: Romans 3:21–24; 15:7; Titus 3:4–5
I am ugly, undesirable, too sinful.	In Christ, you have a new heart. You are a new creation: 2 Corinthians 5:17
I am unwanted and alone.	You are chosen: Ephesians 1:4–5, 11
I am unusable. I've blown it too badly.	You are called by God for his eternal purposes: Matthew 9:9–12; Luke 15:7; 2 Timothy 1:9–10
I'm just one of the crowd.	He knows every detail about your life. His thoughts about you are more than all the sand on the seashores. He goes before you and behind you. Psalm 139:1–6



The Bible is clear. You and I are not merely forgiven sinners, we are saints. That word *saint* has twisted meaning in our culture. People say things like, “Old Aunt Bertha sure was a saint. She never said an unkind word.” Or we think of very special people, like Saint Francis of Assisi, who live such unusual and miraculous lives that they’re called saints. That isn’t the true meaning of the word *saint*. To be a saint means to be holy. *Holy* means set apart. Everyone in Christ is a saint. God has chosen us and set us apart for himself. We are his. We literally have Christ living, breathing, speaking, and moving within us. The term *in Christ* is used eighty-two times in the apostle Paul’s letters: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17). “This is the secret: Christ lives in you” (Col. 1:27 NLT). This truth is the bedrock of Paul’s theology. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Cor. 6:19). Paul doesn’t talk to the Corinthians as sinners who need to try harder to get it right. He speaks to them as saints who need to remember their true identity.

Being the Beloved expresses the core truth of our existence.

**Henri Nouwen**, *Life of the Beloved*

God’s Spirit dwells in our hearts! Therefore, deep down, in our redeemed hearts, we want to love God. Through the miracle of our new covenant heart, our hearts are now inclined toward God—not away from him (Rom. 6). We want to love God and others because that’s what Jesus, who lives in our hearts, always wants to do! Sadly, too many Christians have been taught that they are forgiven and covered by the blood but that their hearts are still utterly sinful. No. There is gold inside every believer. We are no longer sinners by definition. By definition, we are saints who struggle with sin. That’s the truth.

You and I are not just forgiven sinners; we are new creations in Christ. While sin exists in our fallen nature, our fallen nature no longer defines who we are. We are alive to God (Rom. 6). Our sin is the tarnish that hides the gold. But the gold defines who we are. Sin is not our master. I know it often feels like it is, but we must believe the truth. Christ in us is our truest and deepest identity! Jesus lives in our hearts! Therefore, our hearts are good. Ask God to help you embrace who you really are in Christ. Ask God to help you believe the truth about your true name and identity.

People ask about Jeremiah 17:9 which says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.” How can our hearts be good if Jeremiah says they’re deceitful and beyond cure? When Jeremiah wrote chapter 17, Israel’s heart was so corrupt they were beyond cure. There was no





hope. As a result, they needed a new heart. Israel needed a heart transplant. Therefore, Jeremiah foretold that the new covenant was coming (Jer. 31:31–33). You and I are living in the time of the new covenant. Through Christ, we’ve received the heart transplant. The double transfer has taken place: our sins have been transferred to Jesus and the righteousness of Jesus has been transferred to us. This isn’t just theology. Christ actually lives in our hearts! Our hearts are good. That’s the biblical doctrine of Christ’s imputed righteousness. It’s real and alive! Jesus lives, breathes, and speaks from within our hearts.

As you reflect on these truths, continue to think on your life story. **Write down ways God has spoken truth into your life.** Think about the significant people who have believed in you and mentored you in ways that have helped you believe the truth about God and his love. How did they help you come to believe that Jesus is for you? If memories like that don’t come to mind, write about the other ways you have seen the faithfulness of God in your life.

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In light of what God says and feels about you, what would you say is your true identity—the identity bestowed upon you by God’s kind and loving heart? **Write it down:**

My true identity in Christ is:

We all share a common identity in Christ. We are God’s dearly loved children. We are his new creations. Andrea embraced her identity in Christ as Radiant. During a men’s backpacking trip in the Manistee Forest, we all gave feedback to one another about how we see Christ in each other. My friend Chris said, “Field Commander” came to his mind when he saw me leading other men toward Christ. I’ve also been told the name “Gary” means “Mighty Warrior.” Those names have a common theme. In Christ, I’m not a strikeout. I’m a warrior and field commander of the King, who fights for the hearts of others.



Reflect on the following questions as you finish writing your story:

**If you believed the truth of who you are in Christ, how would that influence the way you relate to others?**

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**How would you see others differently if you saw their true identity? How would you treat them differently?**

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**What will help you hear and believe the truth about who you are in Christ as you greet your spouse, children, boss, coworkers, friends, and enemies?**

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**Write down Bible passages** that you can take with you through the day to help you believe the truth when you face the groaning of life. Those passages can help you hear God’s voice, urging you to turn north to him and to be thankful, knowing you’re secure in Jesus.


Now, **share your story** with your trusted friends so God can use each of you to help one another believe the truth about who you are in Christ. And have fun embracing your security in God as you take risks in loving others.

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About *Telling Our Stories*:

Adapted from the book *True North*, this *Telling Our Stories* booklet shows you how to confront the lies you've believed so you can let go and embrace the truth of who you really are in Christ.

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True North Ministries

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