

Honouring The Story Within You

To live by grace means to acknowledge my whole life story, the light side and the dark. In admitting my shadow side I learn who I am and what God's grace means.

Brennan Manning

The Power of Story

All of us carry a story inside of us—a one-of-a-kind journey that only we have been on. Each of us is a uniquely crafted and divinely purposed creation of God. Every event, conversation, and experience has left its mark on our life – shaping, refining and defining our attitudes, expectations and choices, about who we are and how we will engage in the world. Our stories, in all their beauty and heartache, shape and influence every dimension of our daily life and relationships. Knowing the impact of our story and finding God's redemptive work within it, is vital for emotional, relational, and spiritual formation and health. For some of us the temptation is to only focus on the positive experiences of our life and put the painful ones behind us. For others all we see are the mistakes and dysfunction of our journey. Neither are the whole story. Unless we address all of our story, the goodness and pain, the heartache and joy, we are limited in our ability to access the fullest, healthiest version of our selves.

When we deny our stories, they define us.

When we own our stories, we get to write a brave new ending.

At any moment in our life we have the opportunity to say this is not how my story will end.

Brene Brown

Human beings have a basic need to understand. We all attempt to process and organise our experiences internally but this process is easier for some, more than others. When we experience trauma however, the stress of that experience causes nearly all of us to fragment, dissociate or become numb. We lose the tools as well as the map that help guide us towards understanding. Sadly, many of us have been silenced through feelings of shame and fear. When we revisit an experience and start to plot-point the narrative we have created about it, we live through our story in a new way.

Our personal narrative offers us a chance for not just understanding, but for reorganization of our sense of self. A self that was wounded, broken, frightened or lost—but can now be reclaimed. The power of telling your story allows you to transform the foreign into the familiar, it helps make the unspeakable, speakable. Honouring our story reminds us that we are part of a much bigger story. Sharing our story reveals God's grace and releases courage and hope into the lives of others.

The following writing prompts are merely tools to help you begin a journey that will unfold over a lifetime. Treat yourself with kindness and gentleness, do not rush, there is no deadline. Find a place that is quiet, relaxing and without distraction. Turn off your phone or switch it to silent. Don't self edit! Allow yourself to write whatever comes to your mind. Every memory contains something important, don't trivialise an experience or the emotions attached to it. If you get stuck, take a break and come back to your journal later. Allow the thoughts that have been prompted by this exercise to marinate for a while.

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A few questions to get you started

- What is your earliest childhood memory?
- Can you describe the sights, sounds and smells that accompany that memory?
- How do they make you feel now? Why?
- Describe your family of origin.
- What was it like to grow up in your household?
- Is there one family member that stands out for you? How did this person influence you?
- Describe your closest childhood friend. Why were you friends?
- How has that friendship shaped you?
- Did something happen to you as a child that changed the course of your life? It could have been a family crisis, or it could have been a positive experience.
- Sometimes we make choices that take us down roads we later regret. Is there a particular experience that stands out?
- How did that experience change you?
- Flip through an old photo album (or scroll through Facebook), and find a photo that catches your eye. Write a short description about your relationship with the people in the photo and their significance in your life.
- What is your greatest fear?
- Do you know where that fear comes from?
- How do you manage that fear?
- What are your earliest memories of God?
- How would you have described him then?
- How would you describe him now?
- What is the source of your greatest sadness?
- Was God present during that time? How?
- What brings you joy?
- When do you feel most alive and free?
- What makes you hopeful?
- What are you grateful for?

If you prefer to draw, paint or 'craft' your story without words then 'go for it'. This is not an exam but a healing experience. ☺ If any of these questions trigger painful memories that cause distress then please reach out to a trusted friend or seek help from a professional counsellor. This is not a journey that should be travelled alone. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or feedback, submissions@thesheisproject.org.

Additional Resources

To Be Told: God Invites You to Coauthor Your Future by Dan B. Allender

Writing as a Way of Healing by Louise DeSalvo

The Power of Memoir—How to Write your Healing Story by Linda Joy Myers

www.thegiftofwriting.com Claire de Boer

The She Is Project
thesheisproject.org