

Life Mapping: Sitting with Your Story

The life map is a powerful tool! It provides a medium for you to go back and sit in the story of your life. By taking time to explore and focus on your life experiences you will gain a better understanding of yourself. You will see common threads God has woven through the fabric of your life. Taking a macro look at your life experiences to date often opens you grasping His unique call or mission for you.

During the exercise you can remember and give thanks for those amazing people that He introduced you to and an understanding of how your life was shaped through them. You can reflect on formational experiences where your character was formed. And you can gain understanding of the impact some of the painful experiences have had on your relationships, your vows, and your picture of God. You may see how these experiences translate into how you feel, how you relate to others and how you interpret the way that others relate to you. In addition, there is power in telling your story to others. We have had the opportunity to do this several times and were surprised how the experience changes. Each time we did this, it gave us a greater understanding of who God created us to be and opened us up to greater insight as we shared my story with others. You may wish to process your unfolding story with a spiritual director or therapist.

It is important not to hurry through this exercise and create your life map. Don't rush yourself, but steadily work at it until you feel like it is somewhat complete providing a good picture of your life inclusive of the people and experiences that have shaped you. For many people photos help jog memories. If you have time in advance to go back through family photos, you may find that preparatory for this life map exercise because it brings up memories of you at different ages and stages of life. You might even want to bring a few photos along with you.

You will also need to materials for this project. You will need 2 stacks of post-its and a manila folder (you will find those in the armoire in the living room). Start the life map exercise by just brainstorming on the people, places and events that have shaped your life. Jot them down on the yellow post-its, writing one per post-it, and using just a few words to describe it. Let the ideas flow and keep going, not allowing yourself too much time to linger here yet. Don't worry about any order of events either. That is the beauty of using post-its to allow freely jumping around. Ordering comes later. It may be helpful to think about people, places, events, education, jobs, interests and your personal process of salvation. Consider deeper topics like successes or failures. Were there any shifts in your personality or relationships? Consider things you have done or that happened to you that bring up feelings of joy or pride. Also consider your deepest hurt and disappointment.

- *Events that you see as positive (successes, achievements, happy experiences, etc) go on one color post-it and negative events (failures, losses, hurts/wounds, etc.) go on different color post-its.*

When you think you have captured most of the important pieces of your life story, it is time to arrange them on the tag board in some logical fashion. You may choose chronological, life stages, geographical locations, or something else that feels more natural to you.

First place all the positive post-its on the opened folder, and place the negative post-its below. Simply transfer the words from those yellow post-its to the hot pink ones and replace it on the tag board.

The next steps is to take a closer look at your story that these individual events are beginning to tell. You may want to journal through this section if that helps you to stay focused or remember this better. Ask God to be with you as you sit with your story. Remember God's promise to you is found in this paraphrase of Roman's 8:28 "The Lord may not have planned that this should overtake me, but He has most certainly permitted it. Therefore, though it were an attack of an enemy, by the time it reaches me, it has the Lord's permission and therefore, all is well. He will make it work together with all life's experiences for good."

- As you look back on your story what do you observe?
- Do you see any patterns of how God works in your life?
- As you reflect on your life, do you get any insight into what God was or is now teaching you?
- Look for life markers: they may be significant people, events or objects that God used to help shape your life and teach you important lessons. What are those markers?
- Look for personal lessons where God taught you about Him, yourself or others through a person or situation He used in your life. Write down those lessons
- Does a truth in scripture come to mind that summarizes your personal lesson or principle. Make note of it.
- Where do you see God's fingerprints in your story and what did you come to believe about Him at those times? Make a note of it.
- Pay attention to the hot pink notes. Can you pinpoint any deeper beliefs that were authored during that experience?
- During those experiences it is common to make a vow or believe a lie. "I vow to never again . . ." or "I am not as valuable as others . . . (in some way). These beliefs often become very deep and hidden. Unearth them. Examine them without labeling them bad or good per se. Just recognize what you have come to believe. Trust God to carefully uncover them and be present with you in the process. Journal on this uncovering.

After doing the exploratory exercise above:

Telling others your story is an important next step because there is power in your story as its telling engages the heart, mind, and emotions of both you and the persons with which you share. You are sharing who you are with another person so they might experience you and appreciate God's workmanship in much greater depth. This process of externalizing what you have unearthed and explored, can clarify your vision and calling as you come more in touch with the threads He has sown into your life and the shaping experiences He has orchestrated.

But, be aware, and be prepared. This exercise, may also take you back to some really painful experiences. Try your best to lean into and examine the pain or discomfort you feel. Remember that revisiting them can take you to brokenness where healing can take place. The beatitudes remind us that “blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” You might find yourself in a place of repentance, or needing to employ forgiveness (of yourself and/or others) that leads to freedom. I like how Nathan Shattuck instructs us to tell our story. He tells us to think of it like the string of a pearl necklace: the string is essential to tying things together, but it’s not the heart of the matter. In telling your story it is easy to focus on the chronology and logistical details but never get around to the pearls: those significant shaping moments or patterns that you experienced and reacted to by protecting yourself from rejection or abandonment. The pearls are those significant momentous times where core lessons and beliefs were learned and you encountered God perhaps in new ways. These pearls bear witness to who you really are, the plans 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 were purposely designed to be and then you can step into His unique reason for creating you.

There is so much material here for you to consider. Again, don’t outpace yourself in order to finish. But don’t allow Satan to distract or discourage you or condemn you as you give time to understanding your story. Don’t hesitate to pause and take a break or nap or move around. It would be my privilege to hear your story and process that with you if God wills it. Perhaps this is an exercise you want to take back home to your spiritual director or a therapist to process. Please prayerfully consider what to do with what you experienced here at The Haven. Don’t just stick the folder in a drawer and forget it. Let you light shine.

We hope and pray that any time you spend at The Haven promotes better understanding of who you are, how much God loves you, what his purposes for you might be, spiritual healing, encouragement, refreshment, your spark rekindled, a pathway made apparent or anything else the falls in the general domains of healing, growth, clarity, and care of your soul.