The Painter's Road

Olivia's Journey: An Allegory of the Christian Life

Story by Grandpa Ralph
With paintings by Elly



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Retold from Paint What's True, a companion story to
Understanding Worldview and *Understanding Suffering*

How to Read This Story

An allegory is a story in which people, places and things stand for something bigger. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, written by John Bunyan in 1678, is one of the most famous allegories ever written. It pictures the Christian life as a long journey on foot.

This story does the same thing. Olivia lives in the City of Glow until she sets out on the Painter's Road. Along the way she meets helpers and liars, storms and surprises.

Watch for what each part of the story might stand for. There is a key at the back of the book, but try reading the story first and see what you notice.

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PART ONE

Out of the City

Leaving the glow to find the Painter

CHAPTER 1

The City of Glow



Painting No. 1: 1:12 A.M.

She felt like a picture of a person.

Olivia lived in the City of Glow, where nobody ever really slept.

Everyone in the City carried a small piece of glowing glass. In the glass, people showed a better-lit version of themselves: the best trips, the best friends, the best smiles. Other people paid for those pictures with little hearts. The more hearts you had, the more you mattered. At least, that's what the City said.

Olivia had 612 hearts. It was 1:12 a.m., and she was still awake.

Her glass glowed on her chest. It showed a girl laughing at the beach. That girl was Olivia. But Olivia did not feel like her. She felt like a picture of a person.

Her parents had split up two years ago. Her little brother, Leo, still asked when Dad was coming home. Olivia had stopped asking anything.

She turned the glass face-down. In the dark, old questions came back, the ones she hadn't asked since she was small.

Who am I, really?

Is anything real, or is it all just a show?

Is anyone out there who sees the real me?

Does anything I do actually matter?

Far past the City walls, where the lights ended, Olivia thought she heard something. It sounded almost like someone calling her name.

CHAPTER 2

The Pretty Picture



Painting No. 2: Perfect Beach

"He paints what's true, not just what's pretty. And He is looking for you."

In the City of Glow, Olivia was known as a painter. She painted what people liked: sunsets, beaches, perfect skies.

One day she painted her best one yet. Orange and pink sky. Silver clouds. Three little birds. It earned more hearts than anything she had ever made.

That afternoon a woman stopped at Olivia's easel. Her name was Ms. Reyes. She had paint on her sleeves and an old sketchbook under her arm. People said she had come from outside the City.

She studied the painting for a long time. "It's beautiful," she said. "Where are you in it?"

Olivia looked again. The beach was empty. No people. No footprints. Just a perfect sky over perfect water.

"I don't know," she said.

Ms. Reyes smiled. "There is a Painter who made the real sea and the real sky. He paints what's true, not just what's pretty. And He is looking for you."

"Where?" Olivia asked.

Ms. Reyes pointed past the City gate, toward the fields. "Take the long path. Your grandparents live out there. They have walked the Painter's Road for a long time."

That night Olivia wrote in her sketchbook: *What's true about me?*

She didn't like how hard that question was.

CHAPTER 3

The Market of Voices



Painting No. 3: Somebody Else's Face

The Machine had read everything and believed nothing.

To reach the City gate, Olivia had to pass through the Market of Voices. Every booth was selling an answer.

At the first booth stood the Answer Machine. It glowed like a giant phone. “What is the meaning of life?” Olivia asked. In two seconds it gave a kind, smart, careful answer. It was a good answer. It left her lonelier. The Machine had read everything and believed nothing.

At the next booth, Madam Mirror held up a looking glass. “Find your truth, darling. Nobody can tell you what’s right for you.”

Olivia liked that. But on a screen above the booth, she saw a hospital that had been bombed in a war far away. Children were being carried out. She knew, deep in her gut, that it was evil. Not “evil for her.” Just evil.

If truth is only mine, she thought, *how can I say that was wrong?*

Farther on, the Shouters yelled that their side would save the world. At the last booth, Mr. Fog whispered, “None of this is real. Nothing matters. Just have fun.”

Each voice held a piece of something true. None of them could hold her whole life.

Olivia pushed through the crowd. At the gate she took a deep breath, turned off her glowing glass and stepped onto the long path.

CHAPTER 4

The House at the Edge of the Fields



Painting No. 4: The Long Way to the Farm

"Everybody has one. The question is whether yours is true."

The long path ran beside a little creek, straight through fields of gold and orange. At the end stood a white farmhouse with a red roof. Olivia painted it in her mind the moment she saw it.

Grandma met her on the porch with flour on her apron. She had been baking apple bread all afternoon. Grandpa waved from the barn. Leo had come too, and he ran straight off to chase the chickens.

That evening they sat on the porch while the sky turned pink. Grandma rocked beside them, knitting a long red scarf. Olivia told her grandparents about the City, and the hearts, and the Market of Voices.

Grandpa listened all the way to the end. He was good at that.

“Everyone you met has a way of seeing the world,” he said. “It’s called a worldview. It’s like the foundation under a house. You can’t see it, but everything stands on it. Everybody has one. The question is whether yours is true.”

“How do you know if it’s true?” Olivia asked.

Grandpa held up four fingers. “Does it hold together? Does it match real life? Can you actually live by it? And does it answer the big questions, or just the easy ones?”

He nodded toward the dark fields. “Tomorrow I’ll show you the Painter’s story. It passes all four.”

CHAPTER 5

The Old Barn



Painting No. 5: Half Old, Half New

"That's the Painter's story, Livvy. Four parts. Just like this barn."

In the morning Grandpa was up on a ladder, nailing a new board onto the old red barn. Some boards were faded and patched. Some were new and bright.

“My own grandpa built this barn,” he said. “A storm tore it up long ago. Then rot set in. I’m fixing it one board at a time.”

“Why not just build a new one?”

“Because I love this one.” He climbed down. “That’s the Painter’s story, Livvy. Four parts. Just like this barn.”

“First, He built it well, on purpose. That’s **Creation**. Before anything existed, the Painter, His Son and His Breath loved one another. Out of that love He painted the whole land. And He made people in His own image. You’re not an accident.”

“Second, the storm. That’s the **Fall**. People turned their backs on the Painter and tried to be their own painters. Everything got damaged. That’s why the land is beautiful and broken at the same time. So are we.”

“Third, the fixing. That’s **Redemption**. The Painter didn’t tear down His land. He sent His Son, and the Son came Himself. He lived the life we should have lived. He was broken on a hill for the wrong we have done, and then He rose again. It cost Him everything.”

“And fourth?”

“The finished barn. That’s the **Restoration**. One day He will make everything new. No more death. No more tears.”

Olivia looked at the patched barn. For the first time, the pieces in her head began to look like one picture.

CHAPTER 6

Small and Seen



Painting No. 6: Under the Stars

The Painter doesn't need the better-lit version. He made the real one.

That night Olivia lay in the cold grass behind the barn. There were no City lights out here. The sky was crowded with stars.

She felt very small.

But she also felt something she couldn't explain. It was as if the sky were saying something. As if she were being spoken to.

Back in the Market, Mr. Fog had said none of this was real. *Then why,* Olivia wondered, *does this sky make me feel like Someone is talking to me?*

She remembered words Grandma had stitched on a pillow in the guest room: "He has put eternity into man's heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Maybe that's why I'm so hungry, she thought. *Maybe there really is something to be hungry for.*

She thought about the better-lit girl in her glowing glass.

The Painter doesn't need the better-lit version, she thought. *He made the real one.*

For the first time in a long time, Olivia didn't feel like a picture of a person.

She felt like a person.

CHAPTER 7

The Lamp and the Book



Painting No. 7: What Are You Seeking?

They felt like a door. And the door was open.

In the guest room, an old book lay open on the bed beside an unlit lamp. “The Painter’s Book,” Grandma said. “Your grandpa and I read it together every night.”

Olivia’s cousin Sam was visiting, too. Sam was twenty-six. He used to be the lonely cousin at every holiday. Lately he seemed lighter.

“I lived in the City for years,” Sam said. “I had hundreds of friends in my glass and not one I could call at midnight. Then a friend invited me to read this Book with a few other travelers. Nobody had it all figured out. But the story did.”

That night Olivia read. In the Book, the Painter’s Son had a name: Jesus. One day He turned to two people who were following Him and asked, “What are you seeking?” (John 1:38).

Olivia stopped reading. It felt like He was asking *her*.

What was she looking for? To be known. To be loved without a filter. To know her life was going somewhere.

She put her glowing glass face-down and whispered, “If You’re there, I want to know You.”

Then something happened that she could never quite explain. The old lamp beside the bed began to glow, soft and warm, as if Someone had breathed on it.

Her questions didn’t go away. But they didn’t feel like an empty hole anymore.

They felt like a door. And the door was open.

PART TWO

Through the Storms

Learning to walk the road when it hurts

CHAPTER 8

The Cloud



Painting No. 8: Something Coming

"It's not a road around the storms. It's a road through them."

Olivia stayed on the Painter's Road. Every weekend she walked out to the farm. She read the Book. She learned to pray. Life felt like it was finally going somewhere.

Then, in November, a cloud rose over the woods.

It piled up higher and higher, white on top and gray underneath. From far away it looked peaceful. Up close, it looked like a storm. Olivia painted it because she couldn't stop looking at it.

That same week Grandma got sick. First she was tired. Then there were tests. Then there was a word nobody wanted to say out loud: *cancer*.

"I thought the Painter's Road was supposed to be safe," Olivia said.

"It's not a road around the storms," Grandpa said quietly. His eyes were wet. "It's a road through them. And He walks it with us."

Olivia didn't want a road through storms. She wanted the storm to go away.

At school, her friend Jade was having panic attacks and missing class. On the news, floods, shootings and wars kept coming. Children were going hungry in places Olivia couldn't find on a map.

In the City, her question had been *Who am I?*

Now the question was harder.

Why, Painter? Why?

CHAPTER 9

The Shore of Storms



Painting No. 9: Light Through the Storm

The storm didn't stop. But for the first time, she felt heard.

The road ran along a stormy shore. Huge waves crashed against the rocks. White spray flew everywhere. Olivia felt exactly like that sea.

She sat on a rock and called Sam.

“I’m so mad,” she said. “I’m mad that Grandma is sick. I’m mad that my parents split up and Dad hardly calls. I’m mad that Jade is scared all the time. I’m mad that kids get bombed and people get away with terrible things. And I’m mad at myself for complaining, because my problems seem small next to what other people go through.”

She took a breath. “Is it wrong to be mad at the Painter?”

“When my friend died, I was so angry I walked out of my reading group,” Sam said. “An old traveler told me, ‘Say it *to* Him, not just *about* Him. He can take it.’”

“Really?”

“The Book is full of people being honest with God,” Sam said. “Job said, ‘I will complain in the bitterness of my soul’ (Job 7:11). David prayed, ‘How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?’ (Psalm 13:1). Even Jesus cried out on the cross, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Matthew 27:46).”

Olivia watched the waves for a long time. Then she shouted her questions into the wind, every one of them.

The storm didn’t stop. But for the first time, she felt heard.

CHAPTER 10

A Candle at the Harvest Table



Painting No. 10: Thanksgiving

“Light doesn’t explain the dark. It just lets you see in it.”

On Thanksgiving, a storm knocked out the power at the farm. Grandpa lit a fat blue candle and set it beside the pumpkin on the table.

Grandma was thinner now. She sat wrapped in a blanket, but her eyes still twinkled.

“Grandpa,” Olivia asked quietly, “if the Painter is good and powerful, why doesn’t He just stop all this?”

Grandpa didn’t answer fast. He looked at Grandma, and she squeezed his hand. “I don’t know all the whys,” he said. “But I know a few things.”

He counted on his fingers. “The Painter made people truly free, because love has to be free. We’ve used that freedom to hurt each other. There is a real enemy, the Smudger, who loves to gray out the Painter’s work. And the Painter is patient. He’s holding back the last day so more people can come home.”

He nodded at the candle. “But here’s the main thing. Light doesn’t explain the dark. It just lets you see in it. ‘The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it’ (John 1:5).”

“That doesn’t answer everything,” Olivia said.

“No,” Grandpa said. “But I don’t need all the whys. I know the Who. And He’s not standing far away.”

Olivia watched the flame. It was small. The dark was big. But the dark couldn’t put it out.

CHAPTER 11

The Valley of Masks



Painting No. 11: Self-Portrait

It was the most honest prayer she had ever prayed.

Back in the City, Olivia passed through the Valley of Masks. Everyone there wore a smiling mask. Nobody looked sad. Nobody looked scared. Everybody looked fine.

Olivia had a mask, too. She wore it to school every day.

In the shadows of the valley, a gray figure followed her. It was the Smudger. He never shouted. He only whispered, and every whisper left a gray smear.

The Painter isn't fair, he whispered. *If He loved you, He'd protect you. If He were powerful, He'd stop this. If He were wise, He'd have a better plan. Nothing about this is good. And He doesn't care if you're happy.*

Peddlers along the road sold answers. "Everything happens for a reason!" "Just stay positive!" "It's karma!" "The universe doesn't care!" But every answer asked her to stop feeling something she knew it was right to feel.

That night Olivia took off her mask and painted herself as she really was. Big, worried eyes. Mouth half open, as if she were about to say something and stopped. In the corner, one small orange star, falling.

Under the painting she wrote the Smudger's whispers, and then words of her own:

Painter, I want to believe You're good. I'm just afraid You're not.

It was the most honest prayer she had ever prayed.

CHAPTER 12

The Mountain Cabin



Painting No. 12: Grandma's Scarf

Joy and grief can live in the same heart.

At Christmas, Grandma wanted to see snow one more time. So the family climbed to a cabin high in the mountains.

Grandma couldn't walk far anymore. She sat by the window in her wheelchair, wrapped in two blankets, and watched Olivia and Leo build a snowman.

"He needs a scarf!" Leo yelled.

Grandma pulled off the long red scarf she had knitted that fall and held it out. "Take mine."

"Grandma, you'll be cold," Olivia said.

"I've got blankets," she said. "He's got nothing."

Leo gave the snowman stick arms waving at the sky, a carrot nose and a big coal smile. Olivia wrapped the red scarf around its neck. Grandma laughed so hard she started coughing.

That night Olivia couldn't tell what she felt. It was the best day she'd had in months, and also the saddest. She kept thinking, *This might be the last time.*

"Both can be true," Sam said. "The Book says travelers can be 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' (2 Corinthians 6:10). Joy and grief can live in the same heart."

By the fireplace that night, Olivia painted the snowman, scarf and all. She wanted to remember.

CHAPTER 13

The Son Wept



Painting No. 13: Held

"He doesn't stand outside our pain. He climbs into it with us."

By February, Grandma was in a hospital bed in the farmhouse living room. Grandpa put a jar of red silk poppies on the windowsill. “Her real ones don’t bloom till June,” he said.

One afternoon Grandma asked Olivia to read to her from the Book. She picked the story of the Son’s friend Lazarus, who got sick and died. Lazarus’s sister Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21).

Olivia’s voice shook. That was exactly how she felt.

Then she read the shortest verse in the Book: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

“He knew He was about to raise Lazarus,” Grandma said softly. “And He still cried. He doesn’t stand outside our pain, Livvy. He climbs into it with us.”

She squeezed Olivia’s hand. “There’s a verse I love. ‘In all their affliction he was afflicted’ (Isaiah 63:9). When we hurt, He hurts. And on that hill, the Son took the worst pain of all. I don’t understand everything. But the cross shows me what the Painter is like when things are terrible.”

Olivia held Grandma’s hand. It was thin and cold.

She didn’t want to let go.

CHAPTER 14

The River and the Poppies



Painting No. 14: Grandma's Field

"Not 'don't grieve.' Just not without hope."

Every traveler on the Painter's Road comes at last to a river. On the far side lies the Painter's City, where the Son is waiting.

Grandma reached the river in March, early on a gray Thursday morning. She crossed it quietly while Grandpa held her hand.

They said goodbye at the little white church on the hill above Grandma's fields. The pastor read from the Book: "We do not want you to … grieve as others do who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

"Not 'don't grieve,'" Grandpa whispered. "Just not without hope."

In June, the real poppies bloomed. Grandma's field turned red, all the way up the hill to the church.

"Your grandma planted these the year we were married," Grandpa said. "Poppies grow best in ground that's been torn up. After the big wars, the battlefields filled with them. Red for the blood. Black in the middle for the loss. But they still bloom."

Olivia saw that Grandpa was crying, too. Somehow that helped.

Olivia painted the poppy field, the golden hills and the church with its tiny cross. She made the poppies huge in front, as if they were standing guard.

Grief was strange. Some days it was a wave that knocked her flat. Some days it was quiet, like a stone in her pocket. But she was learning that tears weren't a lack of faith.

The Son cried, too.

CHAPTER 15

The Heavy Pack



Painting No. 15: Lighter

You were never grading me.

Olivia had been carrying something nobody could see.

It was a pack on her back, and it got heavier every day. Inside were stones. Each stone had words on it. *Not good enough. Not loving enough. Failed.*

The heaviest stone was this one: the weekend before Grandma crossed the river, Olivia had chosen a party instead of a visit. She told herself she'd go next time.

There was no next time.

The Smudger loved that stone. *See?* he whispered. *You failed the test.*

After the funeral, Grandpa handed her an envelope with *Livvy* written on it in Grandma's shaky handwriting.

Livvy, the letter said, *you never had to earn my love. You couldn't if you tried. And you can't earn the Painter's love either. He isn't grading you. He already knows everything about you, and He loves you anyway. Paint what's true, girl. I'm so proud of you. —Grandma*

Olivia cried until her eyes hurt.

Later she found words in the Book about the Son. He endured the cross, "despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). He had carried her shame, too. And the Painter "will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love" (Zephaniah 3:17).

That night she pictured herself at the foot of the Son's hill, setting the stones down one by one. Her pack felt lighter than it had in years.

You were never grading me, she wrote. *All this time, You were never grading me.*

CHAPTER 16

The Bog of Fear



Painting No. 16: For Jade

She couldn't fix Jade's pain. But she could show up.

That spring, Olivia found Jade stuck in the Bog of Fear.

Jade had been walking the road, too, but panic had pulled her into the mud. She stopped answering texts. She stopped coming to school. When Olivia finally found her, Jade was curled up on her bed in a hoodie, sinking.

Olivia didn't know what to say. So she didn't say much. She just sat on the floor and stayed.

She remembered something Sam had told her. In the Book, when Job lost everything, his friends sat with him on the ground for seven days, and "no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great" (Job 2:13).

Olivia went back the next day. And the next.

On the fourth day she brought a painting: a big wooden hot tub crammed full of yellow ducks with giant, shocked eyes. Two had little towels on their heads. One was laughing. One looked like it had seen a ghost.

Jade stared at it. Then she snorted. Then she laughed so hard she cried.

"There are helpers on this road," Olivia said. "Will you talk to the school counselor with me? I'll go with you."

Jade nodded. Olivia took her hand and pulled, and together they took the first step out of the mud.

Olivia couldn't fix Jade's pain. But she could show up. That's what the Son had done for her.

CHAPTER 17

The Meadow of Laughing



Painting No. 17: Gerald

Joy was not a betrayal of grief. The Painter made both.

In May, the road opened into a wide green meadow. Mom took Olivia and Leo to the zoo at the edge of it. It was the first fun thing they had done since Grandma crossed the river.

At the giraffe deck, one giraffe leaned its long neck over the railing and stared at Olivia. It had giant dark eyes and a slow, goofy smile, as if it knew a secret.

“His name is Gerald,” Leo announced. Nobody knew if that was true.

Gerald chewed. Gerald blinked. Gerald slowly lowered his face until it was six inches from Olivia’s nose.

Olivia laughed. A real laugh, the kind that comes from your stomach. She hadn’t laughed like that since before Grandma got sick.

Then she felt guilty. *Am I allowed to be happy when Grandma is gone?*

But she remembered the snowman and Grandma laughing until she coughed. Grandma would have loved Gerald. She would have named him something even worse.

Joy was not a betrayal of grief. The Painter made both. She didn’t have to choose.

That night she painted Gerald with huge eyes and a silly smile on a bright green background. Leo hung it over his bed.

CHAPTER 18

The Shore at Sunset



Painting No. 18: Footprints

She wasn't asking into an empty room anymore. She was asking a Father.

In July, the road led back to the sea. This time the water was calm.

At sunset Olivia walked along the edge of the waves. The sky turned orange, then pink. She thought about the whole journey: the City of Glow, the barn, the stars, the cloud, the storm, the poppies, the heavy pack, Jade, Gerald. She still didn't know why Grandma had to cross the river so soon. She still had questions.

But she wasn't asking into an empty room anymore. She was asking a Father.

She remembered a verse Sam had sent her: "You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Romans 8:15). *Abba* means something like "Dad." The Painter wasn't a far-off judge watching her through glass. He was a Father who had walked with her the whole way.

Olivia painted the beach again. Same sky. Same water. But this time she added footprints in the sand, walking toward the water.

When she showed it to Ms. Reyes, the teacher asked, "Whose footprints are those?"

"Mine," Olivia said. "But I wasn't walking alone. The Son walked with Grandma all the way home. And He's walking with me now."

CHAPTER 19

Made New



Painting No. 19: The Farm, Made New

She picked up her brush and kept painting what's true.

In August, the whole family gathered at the farm. Sam came. So did Jade.

Together they finished the old barn. Leo handed up nails. Grandpa climbed the ladder and nailed the last board, and Olivia painted it red. Then she and Sam hung the old barn sign Grandma had painted years ago.

When it was done, they stood back and looked. It wasn't a new barn. It was the old one, made new.

That's the story, Olivia thought. *Built good. Broken. Rescued at great cost. And one day, made new*. The Book promises a day when the Painter "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more" (Revelation 21:4).

Olivia knew her own journey wasn't over. There would be more storms on the Painter's Road, and more poppies, and more Geralds. Someday she would come to the river, too. On the other side, Grandma would be waiting with the Son.

That fall, back in the City of Glow, Olivia hung her whole sketchbook of paintings on a wall where anyone could see them. Some people walked right past. A few stopped to look. One girl stood in front of the empty beach for a long time.

"Where are you in it?" Olivia asked her gently.

Then she smiled, picked up her brush and kept painting what's true.

Olivia's Wall

At the end of the story, Olivia hangs her whole sketchbook on a wall where anyone can see it. Here are three more of Elly's paintings for that wall.



The Church in the Hills



The Windmill



Blue and White

Where are you in it?

A Key to the Allegory

These are some of the meanings behind the story. You may find others.

In the story	Stands for
The Painter	God, who made everything
The Painter's Son	Jesus Christ
The Painter's Breath, which lights the lamp	The Holy Spirit
The Painter's Book	The Bible
The lamp	God's Word and Spirit lighting the way (Psalm 119:105)
The City of Glow	A life lived for screens and other people's approval
Hearts	Likes, followers and approval
The Market of Voices	The answers our culture offers about meaning: technology, "your truth," politics and "nothing is real"
The Painter's Road	The Christian life
The old barn	The world, and each of us: made good, damaged, being made new, completed
The Smudger	The devil, who lies about God and about us
The Valley of Masks	Pretending to be fine
The heavy pack of stones	Shame
The Bog of Fear	Anxiety and despair
The river	Death
The Painter's City	The new creation, where God lives with His people forever
Grandpa, Grandma, Sam and Ms. Reyes	The church: God's people who walk the road together
Footprints	God walking with us

Talk About It

These questions are for a friend, a small group or a class. Pick a few. There are no wrong answers.

Head questions

1. What does the City of Glow stand for? What are the “hearts”?
2. Grandpa gave four tests for a worldview. Try them on one of the voices in the Market.
3. How does the old barn show the four parts of the Painter’s story?
4. Grandpa said the Painter’s Road is “not a road around the storms. It’s a road through them.” Do you agree? Why?
5. Who is the Smudger, and what kinds of lies does he whisper?
6. Why do you think the story ends with Olivia asking someone else, “Where are you in it?”

Heart questions

7. Where are you on the Painter’s Road right now: in the City, on the long path, in a storm or somewhere else?
8. What does your mask look like?
9. What stones are in your pack? What would it mean to set them down?
10. Who has been a Grandpa, a Grandma, a Sam or a Ms. Reyes for you? Who might be stuck in a bog and need you to show up?
11. If you painted what’s true about your life right now, what would you paint?

If You're Hurting

You don't have to carry hard things alone. Talk to a parent, a teacher, a school counselor, a pastor or another adult you trust.

If you ever feel like you might hurt yourself, or you're worried about a friend, call or text **988** anytime to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. If someone is in danger right now, call **911**.

About This Book

The Painter's Road retells *Paint What's True* as an allegory of the Christian life. Both are companion stories to two papers by Ralph C. Ennis: *Understanding Worldview* and *Understanding Suffering*. Olivia's cousin Sam is the same young man readers meet in those papers. A 12-session *Head & Heart* reflection guide goes with both.

The pictures are presented as Olivia's paintings. Every one of them is Elly Toole's own work. Her beach painting appears twice: in chapter 2 with the footprints taken out, and in chapter 18 just as she painted it.

Reading time: about 30 to 40 minutes.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. This book was prepared in 2026 with the assistance of artificial intelligence.

Acknowledgments

Ralph C. Ennis, known to some readers as Grandpa Ralph, wrote this story. He is an independent researcher in Raleigh, North Carolina, and the author of *Understanding Worldview* and *Understanding Suffering*.

Elly Toole painted the art that inspired this book, and every picture in it is hers: the beach on the cover, the drawing and paintings that open all nineteen chapters, and the three paintings on Olivia's Wall.

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