

Engaging Your Story

Story is the heartbeat of God.

We believe that stepping into significant stories in your own life will open up a desire to better know and reveal the story that God is telling. That's why we've created this resource to help you deepen and further your engagement with your story through guided reflection and writing exercises.

To accompany this resource, find audio from Dr. Dan Allender and reflective prompts to guide you through your engaging the impact of your story at theallendercenter.org/engaging-your-story.

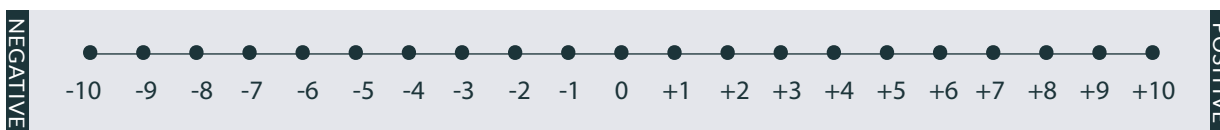
“If we don’t tell our stories, our stories will tell us.
Our stories impact us either unconsciously or consciously.
It’s up to us to decide whether we’ll be passive recipients
or active agents in the shaping of our lives.”
– To Be Told Workbook p. 1-2

1 Reflective Exercise

TIME: 15-30 minutes

REFLECTION: Reflect on memories in your childhood from ages 1 to 18 that you believe have had significant influence on your life.

WRITING: Make two separate lists of memories. On the first list, write 2-3 experiences that specifically brought you harm or heartache (negative). On the second list, write 2-3 experiences that specifically brought you blessing and encouragement and were clearly meant for your good (positive). Write down whatever comes to mind, and jot down just a few words or a short phrase for each memory. Capture a brief statement to help you track and build a list of memories on both sides of the spectrum. After you have built your list, rate them using the following scale: -10 = Most Negative, +10 = Most Positive



MEMORIES OF HARM: These are memories you identify as causing some form of heartache to you, such as experiences that made you feel shame, violated, exposed, foolish, embarrassed, alone or abandoned, emotionally confused or hurt, unloved or unwanted, etc. These memories can represent major places of abuse or harm, or more nuanced experiences such as a comment that left a lasting mark on your heart in some way.

MEMORIES OF BLESSING: These are memories you identify as markers of encouragement and goodness that were influential in shaping and affirming your strengths and gifts, confirming that the world around you is safe and good, communicated love and support that spurred you onward, etc. These memories are about experiences where someone took the time to read you and then speak blessing to you. These moments might include a teacher who refused to believe you were an average student, a coach who delighted in your courage, or a parent who knew exactly what you needed in a difficult moment.

2 Writing Exercise

TIME: 15-20 minutes

WRITING: Write about what this exercise has stirred in you. How does it feel to put these memories on paper? For each of the stories of harm: What is the dominant emotion? How have you attempted to engage these memories in the past? For the stories of blessing: How old do you feel? Can you feel what you felt during the interaction? How do you care for and use that memory for good? Or how does that memory get dismissed now? There is no right answer to reach as you write about your feelings. This is simply a space to react and bring words to the emotions that have been stirred with the memories.

3 Prayer

TIME: 5-10 minutes

PRAYER: We invite you to close your time of reflection and writing with this prayer spoken aloud.

Living God, author of my life and story, I come to you and call your writing of me, my body, heart, mind, spirit and will---good, beautiful, and holy. You made me with delight and precision. You crafted my nose, my eyes, and my arms. You made my hands and feet. You are the very energy of my body, the deepest presence in my being. And I praise you, love you, and trust you and your creation.

Jesus I also confess that I have often ignored my story, denied it, or rewrote it to not read as it does. I confess that I am in a story war and that there are many stories that are unresolved. I am confused and hurt. Angry. Maybe even bitter. Most of all, I confess it is easier to be lukewarm about my past than to engage it with passion.

Spirit of God breathe life into my memory. You are the one who calls forth memory and teaches me how to bring the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus into my daily life. Breathe life into me. Breathe courage into me to face where I have been blessed and where I have been cursed. Use my story to reveal the story of Jesus. Use the revelation of Jesus to take me deeper into the stories of others.

Glorious Trinity, I submit my heart, mind, soul, spirit, and will to you to receive from you all that you desire as I move into what you want to reveal. My heart is open. I am ready to do this work in your power and delight.

I pray all this in the powerful name of Jesus of Nazareth. Amen.

By writing your stories, you begin to see them in a different way. Stories reveal themselves to be something other than what you thought. You can talk and walk at the same time, but writing forces you to step off the path and sit under a tree so you can ponder.” – *To Be Told Workbook* p. 3

1 Reflective Exercise

TIME: 5-10 minutes

REFLECTION: Reflect on the list of memories you created last week. From the stories of harm, is there a particular memory that stands out as the most unresolved, or one where you feel a lingering heartache or negative impact on your life? Likewise, from the stories of blessing, is there a particular memory that stands out as the most important in its goodness and influence on your life? Choose one memory from each list that you would most like to explore further.

2 Writing Exercise

TIME: 20-30 minutes

WRITE: Write the story of what happened in each of the two the memories you have chosen. Try to keep each of your stories under 1,000 words, and describe them with as much detail as you can about the context (setting), the people involved, words that were spoken, and the emotions of how you felt during the interactions or experiences. In other words, get as close to the story as you can through your description of what happened.

Be sure you don't write simply a travelogue or itinerary (“A” and then “B” occurred and finally “C” finished the event). Write honestly and truthfully and you will create, perhaps to your surprise, a compelling short story. Be aware that some of what you write will surprise you and force you to go further into your story. Stories are meant to be written, read, pondered, and then rewritten as new parts of the experience come back to your mind.

3 Prayer

TIME: 5-10 minutes

PRAYER: We invite you to close your time of reflection and writing with this prayer spoken aloud.

Eternal and Holy Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I come to you not as a slave or servant, but as a son/daughter. You have granted me face-to-face access to your throne. I stand before you wearing not my own righteousness, but only the white robes of Christ's righteousness. You have asked me to ask for anything I desire in your name and according to your will. You have asked me to approach you boldly and with freedom. And that is what I ask in your name: expand my heart and grow it so that I might hold more love, grief, and anticipation for your return. Help my heart turn from complacency, indulgence, and self-righteousness to a passion for Jesus.

As I enter the writing of my story, I ask that you would remind me that I am wearing the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shoes of readiness, and that I carry a strong shield and a powerful sword. Help me to write the truth. Enable me to use the pen as a sword to begin to tear down strongholds.

Protect my heart, Lord, against the fiery arrows of evil as I enter the terrain it claims as its own. Grant to me the full measure of your presence and allow me to see in these stories the areas that shame has kept me from pursuing. Grow in me the life of Jesus. Only the life of Jesus.

I pray this all in the righteous name of Jesus of Nazareth. Amen.

“Choosing to engage our stories honestly requires a great deal of courage. Choosing a richer life requires revisiting the past, which may reopen painful wounds of failure and betrayal. The only reason worth entering the pain is the hope that somehow it can be transformed, that through it we will learn to love better and will know more joy.” – To Be Told Workbook p. 2

1 Reflective Exercise

TIME: 20-30 minutes

REFLECTION: Spend time re-reading the two stories you wrote and then reflect and journal on the following:

For the story of harm: If possible, find a photograph of yourself at the age when the story occurred. Prop the picture before you and allow yourself to gaze at yourself for at least a minute before you begin to write. If you have no pictures that are near that time, then let yourself imagine the boy or girl you were at that time. Where would the picture be taken? What would she/he be wearing? What would their face tell you? Next, reflect and journal on the following:

- What does your heart feel as you look at that little boy/girl?
- What does that picture tell you about him/her?
- What got disrupted in your heart through this harm?
- In what ways do you believe this story has impacted how you relate to others, God, and yourself?
- What would you like to see change for yourself in the way this story has influenced your life?

Jesus loves that little boy/girl. If you were to see his face you'd see kindness, honor, and delight. Look at the face of Jesus and write out a blessing for that boy/girl.

For the story of blessing:

- Why does this particular story represent a marker of goodness in your life? What places in your heart and your sense of goodness, safety, and love did it affirm and encourage?
- In what ways do you believe this story has impacted how you relate to others, how you understand God, and how you feel about yourself?
- How does God bless others through your being blessed?

Write out one event (in a 10-minute period of writing without stopping) of how your story/life has blessed another person. Work hard to write in detail and with dialogue if possible.

2 Prayer

TIME: 5-10 minutes

PRAYER: We invite you to close your time of reflection and writing with this prayer spoken aloud.

God of creation, redemption, and restoration, I come before your throne to boldly tell you that I love you and worship you. You are my breath and the deepest part of my being. I praise you that you have made my heart your home. I again welcome you to make my heart larger to enable me to know your love. I pray that riches of the mystery and goodness of your Son's sacrificial death would fill me to all the fullness with your indescribable love. Hide me in your love. Lift me to a high rock out of the direct fire of my enemies. Enable me, Jesus to run the race and not get taken out by anything that hinders or binds me to the kingdom of darkness.

Use these writings and reflections, Holy Spirit, to prompt my heart to see the interweaving glory of how you have used even evil deeds to accomplish your purposes. Allow my heart to trust that not all the harm I have endured needs to be explained, but give me clarity to know what you want to heal in my life. Give me clarity to know what you wish for me to become as I write and read my story. Use this work to propel me far deeper into your story and your love.

All this I pray in the name of Jesus, my savior and Lord. Amen

Thank you for your bravery

We hope this resource has invited you to know more truth and kindness.

If you would like to continue in the process of engaging these stories in your life, we would like to invite you to one of our upcoming Story Workshops. Visit our event calendar for details: theallendercenter.org/calendar