



SOUL CARE

CHRISTIAN COUNSELING • SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Instructions for the 'Life Map' Exercise and Telling Your Story

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Psalm 107:2 “Let the people redeemed by God tell their story...”

Note: *The Lifemap is an exercise that I'd like you to take some time in the next few weeks to put together. I'd suggest working on it in at least two separate sittings, asking God to reveal any shaping people, places, experiences or influences that might not be readily accessible the first time you sit down to do this. Then, using your Lifemap we'll have a session(s) where you'll tell me your life 'story' from your childhood through to the present.*

The Lifemap is simply a tool, a framework within which to explore the many different factors that have shaped who and where you are today. In many ways these factors powerfully influence the way we feel, how we relate to others (including God), and how we interpret and even experience the ways others relate to us. Besides it being a personally powerful exercise that most people unfortunately never experience even once, for my role in facilitating God's work in your heart accelerates the process of gathering the 'data' of your life and heart to focus our time on the areas that are most likely to bring you growth and freedom.

In addition there is also power in telling your story to another. I have done this 4-5 times myself in different contexts, finding that each time for me has been a significant experience of God's continuing revelation of what shaped and misshaped me and his continuing redemption of who I am. I believe it can be that for you as well.

While everyone's journey will be unique, in my experience at Soul Care it's not been unusual for God to use the often uneasy experience of creating their Lifemap, followed by our sessions exploring it together, as the transformational turning point for many of those I've counseled over the years. And remember, as in most things we get out of them what we put into them - I hope you will put your heart into this, your own story. –Nathan Shattuck

Additional Preliminary Instructions:

Once you have your Lifemap put together, we'll have a session (usually a few sessions after your Initial Session - to give you time to do the exercise without having to rush it) where you'll bring your Lifemap with you and use it as a guide to walk me through the journey of your life. If married (often even if the spouse isn't part of our counseling process), it's best if both of you can be present, because hearing the Lifemap can help them know and understand more of where you're coming from as a person and hopefully be less likely to misunderstand your motivation than they did

before knowing the context of your life story with the degree of depth the Lifemap often results in. But there are times where, for specific reasons, a spouse would prefer to have the Lifemap session(s) alone or to go through it without their spouse before doing so with their spouse present.

Also, for some people going through their Lifemap is a single session, but on rare occasions for a few that's even taken up to 7 sessions – so, because each of our stories is so unique and this is a process where we are being led by the Holy Spirit, there's no rhyme or pattern on how it should be done or what it's supposed to look like. And the instructions in this document are suggestions - if there's a way of doing it that feels more "you," that's fine, be as creative and flexible as you feel led to. Some people end up with what looks more like an art project which really expresses their heart and experience of life and others bring in (I'm not kidding), an Excel spreadsheet that looks more like a flow chart, but which expresses their particular heart and story just as well.

It's important on your Lifemap to not hurry to get it done - just take some time and work on it and see how many times of focusing on it it takes for you to feel like it's somewhat complete (not every detail exactly or totally comprehensive, just a good picture of your life and the people, places and experiences that have shaped you).

One last important thing that can be good to help us remember (especially with things that may be significant but aren't a memory that's just sitting there on the surface all the time) is if you can get as many pictures from throughout your life (most people have to get these from their parent's attic...) and look through them. Through the pictures, look back at the different stages, people, phases, braces!, etc. of your life that may have faded into the background over the years and reacquaint yourself a bit with the boy or girl that was you back in those formative, vulnerable years. Also, if you don't mind, bring a few of those pictures with you to the session when we go through your Lifemap - pictures that are representative of the different stages in your life or if there are any pictures that feel particularly significant to you (positively, negatively or that just bring up some emotion).

1. Supplies Needed:

- Get 1 sheet of white construction paper and 2 stacks of small or medium size Post-It notes – each stack **of a different color (i.e., 1 of yellow Post-It notes and the other of blue Post-It notes)**.
- Taping sheets of printer paper or manila folders together or cutting out the side of a cardboard box also works as the background, but it can be a little harder to keep everything together while transporting to my office and back if the background is too flimsy.

2. Start the Lifemap Exercise by just Brainstorming About Your Life History:

- Take the pad of yellow Post-It notes and brainstorm on the people, places and events that have shaped your life (**write only one of these per post-it note**). Jot down just a few words on each post-it note to capture the idea. Let the ideas flow as a stream of consciousness...

Note: At this point, don't worry about any particular order or sequence, just sit down with the stack of yellow Post-It notes and try to get as many as possible out; especially those in your younger years – which may be less easily remembered but also the most influential in shaping you.

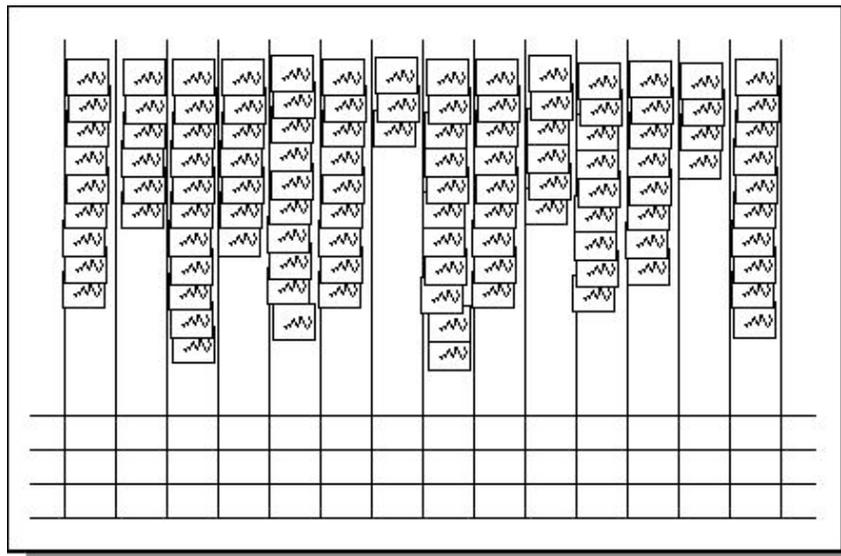
Some questions to prime the pump:

- *What might you share about yourself to a friendly stranger on a long plane ride?*
 - ✓ People
 - ✓ Places (i.e., geographic locations, houses lived in, etc.)
 - ✓ Events (include any before you were born that significantly shaped the emotional, relational environment you were born into)
 - ✓ Education, Job's, Ministries, Hobbies and Interests
 - ✓ Your Process of Salvation
- *What would you share about yourself with a dear and trusted friend?*
 - ✓ Successes – what has delighted you the most in your life?
 - ✓ Failures – what has disappointed you the most in your life?
 - ✓ Were there major personality, mood, relational shifts in you at any point?

On these next two, think of those things you have done as well as those things that have happened to you or around you:

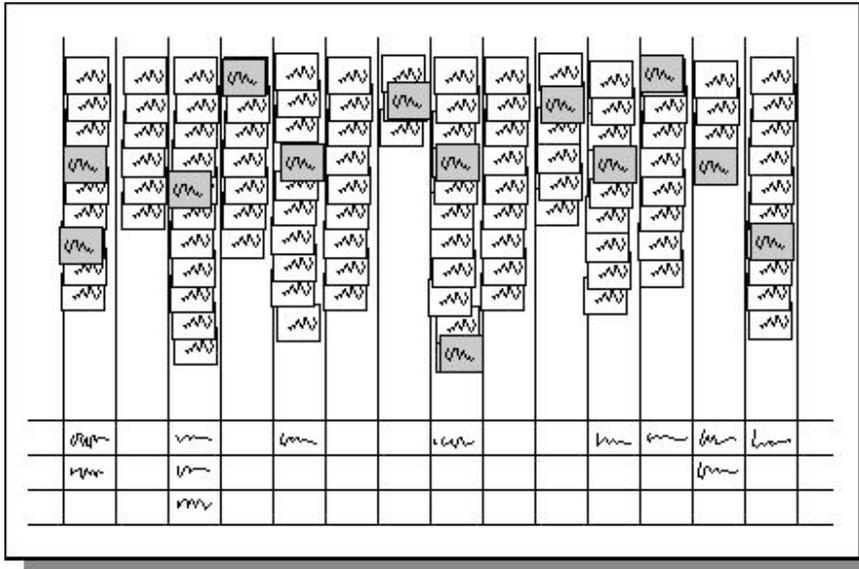
- ✓ Joys - what have been the people, places or events in your life that have been most positive and/or about which you are most proud/happy when you recall them?
- ✓ Sorrows – what have been your deepest hurt(s) and disappointments?

3. Arrange the notes in a logical sequence in the columns of the big sheet (see drawing below). Most people arrange their notes in chronological order from left to right, some using different columns by segments in school or life stages, or different addresses or cities they lived in, etc. But you can do it in whatever order or segments feels most natural for arranging your story.



**** Note: Ignore the rows at the bottom on the drawings, for the sake of time and simplicity we won't be doing that part of this exercise.**

4. Use the pad of different colored post-it notes to **highlight the painful people, places and events**. Transfer the words/names/events on the original painful yellow note to one that is of a different color. This causes the groupings or stages of your life with more pleasant or painful notes to stand out from each other.



**** Again, take your time and add additional notes of the appropriate color (for negative or positive, pleasant or painful) as you recall other people, places and events.**

NOTE:

- **Cognitive Beliefs or Biblical Truths** are taught,
- **But Deep Beliefs** are most often caught (watching other people, especially our parents) and bought in painful experiences, - especially at early ages where we are most impressionable.

*Hence, believers can be living lives that violate their sincerely held beliefs and convictions because they have never confronted and disarmed the power of their personal **Deep Beliefs**.*

Look for Clues as to God’s Calling in your Life!

Look back over your emerging timeline for **patterns** or **themes**. Ask God to reveal to you, now as you are ‘retrospectively curious’ in looking at your life so far, what He was establishing in your life, even before you came to know Him:

- What patterns do you see in the personal inclinations, pivotal decisions, unique opportunities and transforming experiences of your history?
- What was God uniquely preparing you for, even in painful experiences? Remember, God doesn’t waste experiences in our lives. In short, what has God ‘called’ you to in your life?

- 5. Reflect on each column of notes** in turn. Pay attention especially to the colored painful notes. See if you can pinpoint one, two or three (or more) **Deep Beliefs** that were forged during that portion of your life?

Pay special attention to the values forged in the crucible of the painful events? When painful things happen, it is very human to believe a lie (“It must have been my fault that my childhood abuser did that to me.”) or to make a ‘vow’ (“That hurt so much, I will never allow that to happen again!”). These lies and/or vows, become unconscious but powerful guides to our behavior, becoming the, often unexamined **Deep Beliefs** about ourselves, others, life, God, relationships, etc.

Some Thoughts on Telling Your Story

Why Prepare and Tell your Story:

- Because there is power in story: story has long been the primary conveyor of history and shaper of values in every culture of the world – and whether we are aware of it or not, this has been very true in each of our lives - thus the value of laying it out and looking for patterns and themes...
- Stories engage the heart, emotions and imagination, not just the mind.
- All of life is experienced as a story, we are shaped by the stories we live, whether we take the time to understand them or not. That's why God gave us the Bible in a story format – He could have just given us a long treatise on Systematic Theology, but He didn't.
- It can bring brokenness and true repentance: Facing our deepest hurts and disappointments in life can lead to the 'poverty of spirit' that is the foundation of all true change. We can face our pains; forgive those who have hurt us; forgive God for having allowed it to happen; and repent of our self-centered attempts to use this pain as an excuse to not love God and others well.
- It clarifies vision and calling: God was laying sovereign foundations in our lives even before we knew Him personally. Ephesians 2:10 says that we are 'His workmanship - His poem or work of art.' He has a plan for our lives; a unique calling that He wants us to fulfill. Reflecting prayerfully on our lives helps us to discern His threads in the tapestry of our unique designs.

How to Tell your Story?

Think of a 'pearl necklace' analogy as you outline your story:

- The basic chronology of your story is like the string of a pearl necklace; the string is essential to tying things together, but it's not the heart of the matter. It's easy to fall into excessive focus on the chronology or 'logistical' details and you don't ever get around to the pearls – those significant shaping moments or patterns that you experienced and reacted to by protecting yourself from rejection or abandonment, adapting who you were to get the most attention or acceptance you could or surrendered to God in despair of being able to make it work yourself.
- The pearls of the necklace are those significant/momentous times; important times when core lessons and beliefs were learned; when you encountered God afresh; painful experiences when crucial vows or key decisions were probably made. These are those parts of your story that shed insight as to who you really are; the calling that 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 really are and fulfill His unique reason for creating you.

Remember, you are doing this in Grace, so don't compare yourself to anyone else:

- There is no right or wrong way to tell your story
- You have total freedom to be only as transparent and vulnerable as you feel comfortable being
- **At the same time, do let me challenge you to step out of your comfort zone**
- Don't compare yourself to others. You have to be true to who God has made you. This is your story you are telling, not someone else's
- Try to have fun preparing and telling your story. Don't worry about having it perfect or having to impress anyone else