

## 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. It is through looking at your life experiences that you will gain a better understanding of yourself. You will see some threads of commonality that God has woven through the fabric of your life. Understanding that can give you insight on His personal call or mission for you. 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. I have had the opportunity to do this several times and I was amazed how different each time was. Each time gave me a greater understanding of who God created me to be and opened me up to greater insight as I shared my story with others. I would love to process your story with you either while you are here at the Haven or in future spiritual direction sessions.

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.

I have set out all of the items you will need for this project. You will need 2 stacks of post-its and some tag board. 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

quite yet, instead just getting these experiences out on paper. It may be helpful to think about people, places, events, education, jobs, interests and your personal process of salvation. Consider deeper topics like your 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.

When you think you have captured all these 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.

After you have placed all the yellow post-its on the tag board, you are going to use the hot pink post-its to highlight the painful people, places or events. Simply transfer the words from those yellow post-its to the hot pink ones and replace it on the tag board. This now separates your life map into more pleasant and more painful events. As you do this, additional painful events may surface. Take the time to add those things to your life map using the hot pink post-its.

Now is the time to take a closer look at your story. 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 personally 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 teaching you?
- Look for life markers which are 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
- Discover a truth in scripture that summarizes your personal lesson or principle. Write it down
- Where did you see God and what did you come to believe about Him?
- Pay attention to the hot pink notes. See if you can pinpoint the deep beliefs that were forged during that experience. During those experiences it is common to make a vow or believe a lie. These things can become very deep and hidden. Trust God to carefully uncover them and be present with you in the process. Journal on this uncovering.

Telling your story is an important next step because there is power in your story as its telling engages the heart, mind, and emotions. It is sharing of who you are with another person so they might experience you and appreciate God's workmanship. It 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 it can also take you back to some really painful experiences. 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." It can take you to repentance and forgiveness 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 your really are and to 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 pastor to process with. Please prayerfully consider what to do with what you experienced here at The Haven.

It is my hope and prayer that this time here has been profitable for you. I know that God moves when His children seek Him and I trust that He was at work in you. Feel free to ask us for anything you may need and we will do our best to serve you. You are always welcome here at The Haven.