

The Power of Your Story in God

Thesis: We are a people who believe that God is writing his story—history—through our lives and in this universe. God is active in creation, in our lives, and in history. So, we want to pay attention to the story God is telling through Scripture, through history, through creation, through his people, and through our individual lives.

Text: 1 John 1:1-4

God is at work. God is on mission. God is putting heaven and earth together. God is putting his heavenly and earthly families together. And, we get to join God in his family and in the family business.

God is at work in your life and in your spheres of influence.

We are a people who believe that God is writing his story—history—through our lives and in this universe. God is active in creation, in our lives, and in history. So, we want to pay attention to the story God is telling through Scripture, through history, through creation, through his people, and through our individual lives.

I believe that everyone has a God story, not just what God has done in the past, but what the Lord is currently doing. I wonder if you know your current story in God.

Today, I want to talk about *The Power of Your Story in God*.

Let's begin first by considering some of the true stories of God in the lives of some people from the Bible.

The power of God through some true stories from the Scriptures.

1. **The woman at the well tells her story** (John 4:28-30; 39-42).
 - a. *Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.... 39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. 41 And because of his words many more became believers. 42 They said to the woman, "We no longer*

believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (John 14:28-30; 39-42).

- b. The woman at the well in Samaria tells a very short version of the story of Jesus in her life.
 - i. First, she gives an invitation: “Come.”
 - ii. Second, she shares her story: “See [let me introduce you to] a man who told me everything I ever did.”
 - iii. Third, she asks them a question: “Could this be the Christ?”
 - c. What was the result of the woman at the well telling her story?
 - i. Many of the Samaritans from that town **believed in him because of the woman’s testimony**, “He told me everything I ever did” (John 4:39).
 - ii. The town folk **came to Jesus**.
 - iii. They asked **Jesus to stay**.
 - iv. And because of his words **many more became believers** (John 4:41).
 - d. Her story led others to believe in Jesus, led others to experience Jesus (“heard for ourselves”), and helped a town full of people experience the reality that “**this man really is the Savior of the world**” (John 14:42).
 - e. We are talking about **the power of her story** (the woman at the well) **in God**.
2. **The blind man whom Jesus heals tells his story** (John 9:1-34).
- a. As he went along, **he saw a man blind from birth**. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “**but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life**. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, **I am the light of the world**.” 6 Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. 7 “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. 8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” 10 “How then were your eyes opened?” they demanded. 11 He replied, “**The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.**” 12 “Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don’t know,” he said. 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. 15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.” 16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for

he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. 17 Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." 18 The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. 19 "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" 20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. 21 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. 23 That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." 25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. **One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!**" 26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" 28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out (John 9:1-34).

- b. This man in John 9 was born blind.
 - i. The world view of the people of Jesus' day was that if someone experienced such a disability, trauma, or difficulty, that either that person sinned or his family had sinned.
 - ii. Jesus gave them a new mental model: this situation happened so that the work of God, the story of God, might be displayed in his life (John 9:3).
 - iii. By the way, there is also another mental model: we live in a broken world.
- c. This formerly blind man got to tell the story of God in his life several different times:
 - i. First to his neighbors and others who had seen him begging (vs. 11).
 - ii. Then, two times to the Pharisees (religious rulers) (vs. 15, 24-33).

- d. **The power of this blind man's story in God was that he was healed physically and spiritually.**
 - i. *Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him (John 9:35-38).*
 - ii. He was transformed by believing in the Lord Jesus (John 9:35-38).
 - iii. And, his life was a testimony of God against those who claimed to see, yet who were too blind to see Jesus as the Christ, the Son of Man, the appointed and anointed one of God.
3. **Two people on the road to Emmaus tell their powerful story in God (Luke 24:13-35).**
 - a. *Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. 28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while*

he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" 33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread (Luke 24:13-35).

- b. Their story is that Jesus walks with them, and they were unaware.
 - c. Here was their current reality because of the death of Jesus: devastated, discouraged, depressed, and disoriented.
 - d. They actually told an amazing story to Jesus. It turns out that this story was the powerful story of God in Jesus.
 - i. Jesus was a prophet, powerful in word and deed.
 - ii. Jesus was crucified.
 - iii. Jesus was the one whom they thought was going to restore Israel and defeat the Romans. (This testimony of the victorious Christ coming to rule and reign all the nations of the world and restoring his people happens at Christ's Second Coming.
 - iv. On the third day, they heard an amazing report from some women: Jesus is alive.
 - v. Some of the disciples went to the tomb, but they found it empty.
 - vi. This story sounds just like the words of Jesus, which he spoke to his followers over and over again, except for Jesus defeating earthly kingdoms at his first coming.
 - e. So, Jesus meets with them and *"he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).*
 - i. Jesus told them the powerful story of God about himself.
 - f. The power of Jesus' story in God impacted these 2 people.
 - i. *They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).*
 - ii. *Were not our hearts burning?* This power encounter was about the healing of their hearts and restoration.
 - g. **Now, these 2 people on the road to Emmaus had a story in God to tell.**
 - i. They had to tell someone.
 - ii. *They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread (Luke 24:33-35).*
4. **Paul tells his story repeatedly of how God changed his life.**
- a. The power of Paul's story in God turns the world upside down, or right-side up, depending on your perspective (Acts 17:1-9 ESV).

- b. Paul's life was turned upside down on the road to Damascus as he persecuted anyone who belonged to the Way (Acts 9:1-19).
 - c. From that time on, the power of Paul's story in God touched people from Damascus to the nations (Acts 9:19-31; 13:1 through the rest of Acts).
 - d. Over and over again, Paul told his story of what God did for him (Acts 22:1-21; 26:1-29; 29:17-31).
 - e. And, Paul told the powerful story of God in Jesus through the Scriptures.
5. **Paul and his team face and overcome death through the grace of the Lord and the prayers of the saints** (2 Corinthians 1:8-11).
- a. *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many* (2 Corinthians 1:8-11).
 - b. Paul and his team were near the point of death.
 - c. But they were helped by God who also used the prayers and intercession of many believers to render help.
 - d. This passage tells the power of Paul's story in God and the power of the praying community of faith in God.
6. **John tells his story concerning what he has seen, heard, and experienced in God** (1 John 1:1-4).
- a. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We write [share] this to make our joy complete (1 John 1:1-4).*
 - b. The power of John's story in God—what he had seen, heard, and experienced—impacted many lives. God used John's story to usher many others into God's story and into the family of God.

The power of your story in God.

We are a people who believe that God is writing his story—history—through our lives and in this universe. God is active in creation, in our lives, and in history. So, we want to

pay attention to the story God is telling through Scripture, through history, through creation, through his people, and through our individual lives.

Someone on mission with Jesus is always growing. One of the best ways to live missionally is to be growing in your own life, and then share your transformational stories with others. People will be drawn to what God is doing in you. Your stories must be current, though, for them to have the most impact. Have a story and tell your story. Demonstrate how your story aligns with God's dream for the world (*Faithwalking Foundations Module 6 Session 3—The Mission of Jesus*, p. 15).

Transformational stories/ transformation conversations: one way to walk in the light.

We need to practice and engage in spiritual disciplines with sufficient intensity and intentionality, or they fail to benefit us. For example, consider taking a shower. What happens if the water from the shower head just drips upon you? There won't be sufficient force to get you clean.

One way to walk in the light intentionally is to engage in transformation conversations. By definition, transformation conversations are conversations in which you share what God is doing in your life as you pursue each new level of action and level of obedience.

A transformation conversation is one way to walk in the light intentionally, regularly, and organically.

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:5-9).

Principles for walking in the light or having transformation conversations:

1. **We want to share our stories effectively**, so we seek to be **clear, authentic, and passionate**. This skill is called **vision casting**.
2. **We want to share current stories**, not just what God has done in the distant past.
 - a. If you share a story from the past, tell that story in such a way that you are experiencing the impact of that story in the present.
 - b. Spend time in the spiritual practice of reflection, so that you can identify and articulate your current God-stories.

- c. The discipline of reflection helps you pay attention to what God is doing in, around, and through your life.
3. **We want to have different versions of our stories:** the elevator speech (1 – 3 minutes), a more in-depth story (5 – 10 minutes), or the whole story.
4. **We want to practice regularly and intentionally sharing our stories with others.**
 - a. **Clarity:** Our stories will get clearer the more we share them and get feedback from others.
 - b. **Regularly:** We recommend that you have 3 or more transformation conversations a week.
 - c. **Intentionally:** We recommend that you have your transformation conversations with more than one person.
5. **When we share our stories, it accomplishes 2 things:**
 - a. Sharing our stories keeps transformation alive in us.
 - b. Sharing our stories gives the Holy Spirit room to talk to others. “If God can speak to this person, maybe God can speak to me and help me.”

Here are some ideas and topics for your transformation stories:

1. Share what God is showing you or is doing in your life, community, or nation.
2. Share what you have seen, heard, or experienced of God in your life.
3. Identify current reality vs. preferred future.
4. Celebrate progress.
5. Share about what you are doing to overcome vows or strongholds.
6. Share with others that you want to tell true stories from the Bible when you use Scripture.
 - a. Spend time in God’s word so that you can share what the Holy Spirit prompts you to share.
 - b. Ask yourself: What are some true stories from the Bible which God has used to shape me?
7. Here are some other topics for sharing:
 - a. What are you celebrating?
 - b. What are you learning?
 - c. What challenge(s) are you facing?
 - d. What transformation are you currently working on?
 - e. Where are you stuck or stopped?
 - f. Where are you cynical or resigned of ever changing?
 - g. Where are you on mission with Jesus and others?
 - h. What do you need to say?
 - i. Etc.

Addendum: Transformation Conversations

A Way to Walk in the Light Intentionally to Fuel Transformation

Outline of a sermon on July 29, 2012

Text: 1 John 1:5-9

Thesis: One way to walk in the light intentionally is to engage in transformation conversations. By definition, transformation conversations are conversations in which you share what God is doing in your life as you pursue each new level of action and level of obedience.

Pont: I want to introduce you to a spiritual practice or skill that will help in your transformation process, in the journey of becoming more like Jesus (Romans 8:28-29).

Walking in the Light

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:5-9).

Walking in the light is a spiritual practice or spiritual discipline. This is a willingness to recognize God's immanent presence. Here are two applications. First, whatever God shines his light upon, you are to agree with him concerning that issue and handle it as he instructs. Second, we bring to God our own issues, sins, or shortcomings, choosing to hold them in the light before our Lord.

Walking in the light is composed of confession and repentance (1 John 1:7, 9). We agree with what God says about our issue, confess it as sin, and repent to the Lord.

There are two relational aspects to walking in the light. First, we walk in the light with God. An open relationship with God opens the avenue for him to expose wrong thoughts and feelings, transforming us by exposure to his light.

Second, we walk in the light with others. Reflecting and praying with others are also important. God gifts people with discernment and insight that they might help us. We need confessional, open relationships so that accountability is produced and healing is released (James 5:16). Such accountable, submitted, and healthy relationships provide us with protection. What happens when we walk out from under mutual submission, proper submission to authority, and right relationships?

God has called us to be a part of true, Christian community. God is living out his story through us, his body (Ephesians 1:22 23, 2:21 22; 1 Corinthians 12:12 27). Jesus authors a committed community called to engagement (Matthew 28:18 20; John 17:21 23). Therefore, we must learn how to walk in the light with God and with one another, so that we might experience the depths of love which God ordains (Ephesians 3:18) and so that the world might experience the presence of Jesus through the miracle of our unity with one another in Christ (John 17:20 23).

Here is another issue to consider. How can we bear one another's burdens if we fail to walk in the light with each other? We weren't made to journey alone; we need others (Galatians 6:2). We have an interdependent relationship with each other in the body of Christ. We need each other. There is no way to fulfill the one anothers of the New Testament in isolation. We need each other. Humbling, isn't it?

Consider

- It is important to note that many of the people who are trapped in bondage or torment seldom walk in the light with God and others.
- The enemy often goes after the straggler, those who are separated from the herd or body (1 Peter 5:8). Corollary: One indicator that a person is dead meat is when they isolate themselves from regular, consistent fellowship with other believers (Hebrews 10:24 25).
- Francis Frangipane (via Twitter): The areas we hide in darkness are the very areas of our future defeat.
- Jack Deere: What you won't say controls you.
- Healing of the heart is often needed to discover where we are living in bondage to vows, brokenness, curses, torment, falsehood, etc.
- We believe that transformation occurs when we tell the truth about our habitual disobedience simply bringing it into the light to Him and to a few others resisting every temptation to fix it or put a more appealing face on it. Instead, we tell the raw, ragged truth about it and give the Holy Spirit room to do His transforming work. He will begin to reveal the underlying reasons why you don't trust Jesus with this or that. He will reveal the hurt and the stronghold. He will firmly but kindly expose the likely consequences (for you and others) of continuing to live in habitual disobedience. He will give you power to overcome the resignation and cynicism that has reigned in you for so long. He will give you courage to risk entering the Refiner's fire where real transformation occurs (Faithwalking, October 2010).

Authentic followers of Jesus

The world needs to see authentic followers of Jesus. Too often we wear masks and hide our secret and private selves from others. Christians often pretend like we know everything and have it all together. But, the world can see through the facade.

What the world needs to see is people being changed by the presence and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't know all the answers, but we know Jesus, the one who is the answer for every situation. We aren't yet what we want to be, but Jesus has committed the presence and power of his Holy Spirit to us as a promise of the sanctifying and transforming work of God in our lives.

... transformation occurs as we are authentic both with God and with a small community of individuals (1 John 1:5-9). Our transformation is sustained, in part, as we grow in our ability to be real with God and with our community. [We need to practice spiritual disciplines and make opportunities] for being authentic with ourselves and with God (Faithwalking 101 p. 62).

We have observed that it is easier for some people to disclose things in private to an unseen God they've been told won't judge, criticize, shame, or tell our secrets to a bunch of other people than it is to disclose those very same things to people. Why? Because while people cannot turn us to toast with a bolt of lightning from the sky, they can and have judged us, criticized us, shamed us, and told our secrets to others. For many of us, we need pretty consistent doses of a loving and trustworthy community to undo the skepticism and distrust we have developed from experiences in our family of origin and through the years with others ... including other Christians (Faithwalking 101 p. 62).

By the way, if someone shares with you, your job is to:

- Listen: don't try to fix, correct, or counsel; just listen.
- Thank them for sharing. Don't judge, condemn, or criticize.
- Enter into dialogue (asking good questions) to help them find out what the Lord is saying to them and what the Lord is asking them to get in action around. Help them to hear and to respond to the voice of the Lord.
- Pray for them.

So, if we are genuinely free to go directly to God with the whole of our life, including the junk and distorted beliefs; and if we are able to experience God at work in us when we come honestly to Him; then why do we have to take the risks and be authentically transparent with others? There are at least two reasons we can discern (Faithwalking 101 p. 63).

First, it's easy to fool ourselves into thinking we're totally transparent with God, and that we have nothing blocking our hearing from God especially about areas in our lives needing to be addressed. The truth is, all of us have blind spots (or, deaf spots, to keep the analogy consistent) that are firmly established and well defended, emotionally and habitually. None of us can see ourselves totally, or totally objectively. And none of us can hear everything God says. Our years of either not

recognizing, or ignoring, the still, small voice of God and dismissing “thoughts” He has brought to us means **we have to relearn use of our spiritual ears that “hear” what the Spirit discovers in His searching of all things about God and about us** (1 Corinthians 2:10, Romans 8:27) (Faithwalking 101 p. 63).

The second reason God has us be transparent with others is simply that when we look at the life of Jesus and at the early church, the context for disciple making and the prescription for staying aligned with God’s design of us was always relationships. Jesus lived with those he was discipling. In the early church, they met together every day. The art of living in community has been lost in so many ways. And yet the Bible is clear: in order for us to experience transformation and to have unhindered fellowship both with God and with others, we are called to confess our sins to one another, to receive correction from one another, and to listen for God’s prophetic word spoken through one another. (James 5:16, John 1:17 19, Galatians 6:2; 1 Thess. 5:20) (Faithwalking 101 p. 63).

Transformation Conversations: One Way to Walk in the Light

We need to practice and engage in spiritual disciplines with sufficient intensity and intentionality, or they fail to benefit us. For example, consider taking a shower. What happens if the water from the shower head just drips upon you? There won’t be sufficient force to get you clean.

One way to walk in the light intentionally is to engage in transformation conversations. By definition, transformation conversations are conversations in which you share what God is doing in your life as you pursue each new level of action and level of obedience.

Transformation Conversations: 1. Keeping Transformation Alive in Us

The first purpose for transformational conversations is to keep transformation alive in you. If you quit sharing, your own level of passion and focus will diminish. Transformation has a half-life. It must be nurtured intentionally.

For some of us, we will need to schedule appointments each week over a period of time with different people in order to practice intentionality and to share what God is doing in our lives. On the other hand, some people regularly have more opportunities for spontaneous conversations.

One way to begin a conversation is to ask another person if you can share with them for the sake of a homework assignment. Let them know that you are in a process that requires you to share with others what God is doing in your life and suggests that you ask others to pray for you.

Transformation Conversations: 2. Creating Space in Others Where God Can Speak to Others

A second purpose of transformation conversations is to create space with others where the Holy Spirit can draw them into their own intentional transformational journey with God.

When having transformation conversations, one seeks to be authentic, passionate, and clear. For that to happen, the vow (stronghold) and positive vow need to be clear (one sentence). After you have your vow and positive vow down to one sentence, then you can explain and share personal stories to illustrate what God is showing you. *(Plug: You can attend our ETS Class on Wednesday nights or participate in Faithwalking to learn these skills.)*

Obviously, you don't have to share with everyone. It is helpful to pray and ask the Lord with whom he would have you share. Or, pay attention to spontaneous opportunities which the Lord gives to you.

What My Best Self Believes About God

- [Life Model Works](#)
- [February 5, 2024](#)
- 2:28 pm
- [Attachment, Immanuel](#)

By Jen Pfeiler

“Write the first five things that come to your mind when you think about God,” Lydia calmly instructed.

She looked around the group of just under a dozen fellow ministry students. Throughout our time together, we took turns instructing the group. It was her turn to teach and I could sense her hopefulness that we would truly write the first few unfiltered thoughts that came to mind so she could demonstrate her counseling technique effectively. Most students were not used to unveiling their true thoughts beyond “church appropriate” responses. Having previously been to counseling myself, I knew her unstated goal.

I looked across the table and over the heads of my fellow students to glance out the window. The South African sun was slipping below the hills and trees. The air was cooling after a warm spring day. After gathering some inspiration, I wrote down the first few things that came to mind. The things people often say. It wasn’t until the third or fourth item that I tried to quiet an intrusive thought. But it persisted, so I gave into jotting it down.

When she asked for volunteers to share, many people said things like “God is love”, “God is good”, “God is merciful”, etc. I could sense she was hoping there would be a deeper, authentic “freudian slip” that someone would dare to admit so she could guide us through understanding ourselves in order to connect deeper with God. Lydia was not trained in the Immanuel approach, but she had experience using art therapy with human trafficking victims so she was not afraid of those deeper, potentially painful parts of humanity.

Despite what I wanted to write or admit, I volunteered to read off my list. I wanted to give her a chance at taking the exercise to the extent she was going for. I read through the first couple expected points, and then with some hesitancy acknowledged the intrusive thought I wanted to shove away: “God is angry”. That was the annoying, yet unshakeable thing that had come to mind for me.

Now, connection to Immanuel’s joy was not a new or foreign concept. In fact, I had many joyfully bliss Immanuel encounters prior to my trip to South Africa that I treasured deeply. Yet in the desolate hills of the Western Cape around a group of strangers I’d

probably only see once in my life, my mind admitted a secret: Part of me believed God was flippantly angry in my direction.

I don't remember the facial expressions around the room, but my secret was out. Lydia validated the importance of understanding and confronting our authentic thoughts, adding that this method can be an important tool to get to the bottom of what we truly believe about God and other subjects.

Owning my perception of "God is angry" was the first step. Sitting with Immanuel about it was the next step. I knew God wanted to repair trust with me in an area I wasn't even consciously aware I lacked trust. Spending the year prior doing Immanuels, sitting in His peace, joy, and comfort, gave me enough security and capacity to believe for healing connection on the other side of my realization that I believed God was angry at me.

In the next exercise, Lydia tasked us with drawing a nature scene and asking God where He was in that scene. I saw a desert and sand dunes almost immediately. God as the Father was using the intense warmth of a desert to reflect an environment that captured the safety of a warm blanket. As I drew the picture, I sensed the Father was sitting in the middle of the sand dune next to me. He looked at me with gentleness and said, "So you think I'm angry, huh?"

It felt easy to be with Him, but I still felt stuck in my belief that He was truly angry. Not overwhelming me, the Father didn't say much more. We just sat on the sand dunes together while I found comfort in His presence.

After a night's rest, I felt my mind and body carry a renewed capacity to receive more from the Lord on the subject of His anger. So I went for a walk. I had an Immanuel moment where I could sense the Father on the walk with me.

He said, "Jen, I'm slow to anger. My anger is slow."

I understood what He meant. He wasn't flippant or moody. It wasn't just a switch He turned on any time I failed. He is incredibly patient.

The Father continued, almost as if He was paraphrasing Exodus 34 to me, "I'm abounding in steadfast love. I have mercy for you."

He was affirming His affection, His loyalty, and His Hesed toward me. He helped me understand His justice and its dance with mercy. I felt the shame from my failures melt away. My perfectionism and performance wasn't the standard. I trusted His explanation.

I would not have been able to believe the Father's words had He attempted to impart this insight to me a year prior. I would not have let it affect my nervous system and perception of myself. I would have either denied my intrusive thought or been unable to receive His love. Yet, a year of Immanuel encounters and joy moments had laid the groundwork for me to repent – change my mind – about God's perception of my failures.

As humans, we were created to be image bearers of God. Each one of us carries a unique gift mix that reflects a piece of God's heart. This is why life is so precious, despite brokenness and trauma. When we get back to being our best self, we not only get to reflect God's glory, but we also receive the redemption of relational connectedness to God. We trust Him. We trust His redemptive story for our lives.

When we allow ourselves to confront the half-truths, lies, fears, and misperceptions of God, we open ourselves up to new depths of security with Him as He shifts the way we think. My best self authentically believes that God is with me and that He has my best interest in mind. My best self, living from the heart Jesus gave me, is unafraid of Immanuel Himself and enjoys basking in His delight toward me. My best self, with the help of Immanuel, is securely attached to every aspect and attribute of God.