

**14<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Bible Study Retreat**

**Myrtle Beach  
South Carolina**

Session Date and Time	Session Title	Session Teacher
<b><u>Thursday, January 15</u></b>		
6:30 PM	God is Writing Your Story  My Story of Salvation  Video: "Brion Holland Story"	Rich Wilson  Larry Scott Rich Wilson  Interview with Brion Holland
<b><u>Friday, January 16</u></b>		
8:30 AM	My Story  David: Finding God in a Crisis  Playing the Whore  Video: "Norma Abed Story"	Grady Parker  Pat Wilson  Michael Sims  Interview with Norma Abed
<b><u>Friday Afternoon</u></b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <i>Free Time On Your Own Dinner 5:30 PM</i> </div>		
<b><u>Friday Evening</u></b>		
7:15 PM	My Struggle With Imbalance  Sometimes I Offer God Less Than My Best  Destinations	Ernie Hack  Charles Wilson  Steve Murphy
<b><u>Saturday, January 17</u></b>		
8:15 AM	God's Timing is Everything  The Return: Journey Out of Lo-Debar  My Story of Hope	Charles Wilson  Larry Scott  Rich Wilson

# God is Writing Your Story

*Introduction to "This Is My Story"*

God is at work. He is the Author and your life is the His story. Sure, we all live out a story. Maybe one day someone will feel the need to write your biography telling of the events of your life. God is more than a biography writer. In a biography, a person has lived his or her life and someone just records the story. God is actually *writing* your story, even at this moment. This weekend, if your life is open to God, He will actually write a very significant chapter in your life's story.

How does God write your story?

Sometimes God writes in

*Calligraphy*

Sometimes God writes in

**BOLD PRINT OR ALL CAPS**

Sometimes God uses a

**chisel**

Sometimes God writes in

tiny print

## Jesus is the Author

Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)

***<sup>2</sup> Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***

We often talk about God having a plan for our lives. The Bible affirms God's plan and purpose for us in many ways. Hebrews 12:2 is a favorite passage of mine. I love the way it describes God as both the "Author" and "Perfecter" of my faith. God is up to something amazing.

Look carefully at the word "author":

Jesus is the . . .

Originator  
Initiator  
Founder  
Pioneer Leader  
*and*  
Author of our Faith

The word "perfecter" is a strange word. Other than this place, I cannot think of a place where we use this word in everyday conversation. "Perfecter" simple means:

"The One who completes."

Jesus is known as the "Alpha" and "Omega," the "Beginning" and the "End." Hebrews 12:2 shows us how this truth is evident in our lives as well. Jesus starts the story, writes the story and finishes the story. Paul understood this as he said in Philippians 1:6, "***Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.***"

## God's Plan for Your Story

The Bible tells us that God has a plan for our story that exceeds our comprehension. We can barely comprehend life as we know it and live it. We cannot begin to fathom the plan of God for our lives that began even before we took our first breath.

Psalms 139:15-16 (NIV)

<sup>15</sup> ***My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place.  
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,***  
<sup>16</sup> ***your eyes saw my unformed body.  
All the days ordained for me  
were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.***

The word "ordained" used in this passage is often debated. What does it mean when the Bible says God "ordained" all the days of my life. I can't explain it fully but I know something about the Hebrew word used in this verse. The word we translate as "ordained" means "to write" or "has written." God, the Author, wrote your story. God has a plan. *I can live the life God has designed for me.*

We cannot fathom how God began writing our story even before we were born. Now get this: God's authorship of your story goes beyond this life. . . only God could include heaven and eternity into our story as well. Our lives here are so short compared to eternity and yet God has even taken into consideration your eternity. Wow! What a story. What an Author!



## Our Lives: God's Tablet

In the early church there were many teachers but which teachers could be trusted? Teachers would travel with letters of recommendation from others who could vouch for their work. Paul was different. He believed that the true evidence of his ministry was not found in letter but by the lives of those who were transformed. Look to the heart and there you would find God's work. God writes on the tablet of your heart. Through the joy and pain. Through the struggles and the victories, God writes His story where it matters the most.

2 Corinthians 3:1-3 (NIV)

***Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? <sup>2</sup> You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. <sup>3</sup> You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.***

These are profound words:

Our lives are a "letter from Christ"  
The result. . .  
(the result of ministry, pain, struggle, experiences)  
Written by the "Spirit of the Living God"  
On the tablet of "human hearts"

This weekend you will see how God is the Author of your story. But wait! The story is not finished. God will complete your story.

Look carefully at your story.

Gaze deeply into the pages of the great story of your life.

God, the Great Author, is penning the story of your life. You might not know it now but hopefully by the end of this study, you will see your life for the masterpiece it truly is.

# My Story of Salvation

Larry Scott and Rich Wilson

Long before your actual salvation experience, God was busy with His pen writing your story. He was working in the circumstances of your life to draw you to himself. He was moving, even if you were unaware of His work. When you come to Christ you have a salvation "testimony." Most of us have written out our testimony at one time or another. This has become a common practice in evangelism training courses. We need to reflect on what God has done in our lives.

What is your story? When did you come to Christ? What happened in your life that moved you toward salvation? The purpose of this lesson is simple; look back at your salvation story. If you have a relationship with God, you have a story?

Before you tune this lesson out, what kind of testimony do you have? This might be an unusual question to you. We've found at least three kinds of testimonies reflected in the stories below. There are probably many more types of testimonies but these three seem to reflect many of the people we've met along the way. Look carefully at your own story. . .

## Timothy- Growing Up In A Faith Environment

Too many Christians minimize their own testimony. Maybe you've done this yourself. You might have grown up in a faith environment. You went to church as a child. Somewhere earlier in life you entered into a relationship with God through Jesus. Your story might not include stories of wild sin or behavior that could be featured in a movie.

To minimize your story is to *minimize the work of God in your life*. When we diminish our testimony we also *minimize our lostness*. All are lost and in need of Jesus from the wildest to the mildest. The book of Romans reminds us that *all* have sinned and *all* need to be saved.

2 Timothy 1:5 (NIV)

***<sup>5</sup> I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.***

## Saul- Self Sufficient

Most of us relate to the Apostle Paul in a "post conversion" relationship. We read the writings of Paul after he becomes a believer and identify with his struggles, his inner war, and his triumphs. We admire his relentless passionate pursuit of God and stand in awe of his mountain moving faith in the creator. We are spell-bound by his ability to express in simple ideas, the most complex and difficult theological ideas. We are

amazed at his knowledge and intellect. What we are witnessing is the finished product, the polished orator. We have the benefit of seeing this man's religious passion after Christ transforms his heart on the Damascus road. To truly appreciate the servant Paul, we have to get to know the man Saul. (Paul's former name before his conversion). He is a different man altogether. Saul, was a self proclaimed intellectual who hated Christianity with unmatched passion. He was a man who studied at the feet of all the greatest thinkers and philosophers of his day. No one could compare to his excellence in the practice of Judaism. He was an arrogant, self-sufficient, know it all who made it his personal agenda to destroy Christianity by killing it's followers. He was a "HOLY TERROR" ....but then, he met Christ.

Philippians 3:4-6 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> *though I myself have reasons for such confidence.*

*If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.*

### **Woman at the Well- A Shattered Life Restored**

The Bible tells of a woman with a complicated past; five husbands and now a live in boyfriend. She had searched for love and had certainly found many dead ends. When Jesus met this woman she was simply getting water from a well but he knew her need was greater than water. Maybe you came to salvation at a time of great need. Your life was marked by sin and failure. Your life was shattered into pieces.

John 4:13-18 (NIV)

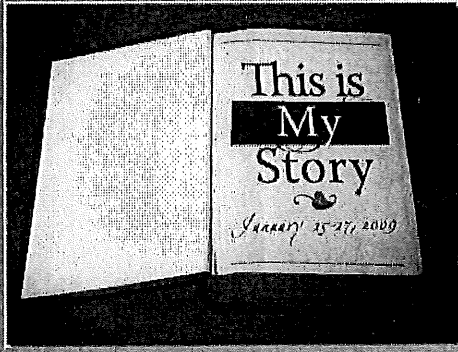
<sup>13</sup> *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

<sup>15</sup> *The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."*

<sup>16</sup> *He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."*

<sup>17</sup> *"I have no husband," she replied.*

*Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. <sup>18</sup> The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."*



# My Story

## Journal Entry

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## **My Story**

Grady Parker

No other word known to man so captures our attention or stirs our heart as the word "HOME." Someone has said that the three sweetest and most important words in the English language are HEAVEN, MOTHER, and HOME. The mention of the word home or family stirs several different kinds of emotion and impressions in heart of each of us today.

### **I. JOSEPH'S FAMILY.**

- A. His Father - Jacob.
- B. Jacob's 12 sons.
  - 1. Joseph - 11<sup>th</sup> son of Jacob and Rachel.
  - 2. Father's favorite
  - 3. This led to ....

### **II. FAMILY TROUBLE**

- A. Envy of Joseph's brothers
  - 1. Results – Joseph sold into slavery in Egypt.
  - 2. This led to mourning and grief in family
  - 3. Evidentially brothers did not fear God.
- B. Home should be first place to learn who God is.
  - 1. God's command

*"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates"*  
(Deuteronomy 6:6-9).
  - 2. Where did you first learn who God is?
  - 3. If you have children, did they first hear about God at home?
- C. God's order for family.
  - 1. HEAD of family - Father
  - 2. HEART of Family - Mother
  - 3. HUB of family - Children.
  - 4. Family trouble come when family is not in God's order.

### **III. FAMILY TRIALS**

- A. Often brought on by unavoidable circumstances.
  - 1. Famine in the land
  - 2. Hunger
    - a. My family's trials

3. God's provision

*"And all countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world" (Genesis 41:57).*

4. Joseph's care for his family

5. Care for my family

a. God's care for us.

*"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19).*

b. I became a Christian at age 17.

*"I was young, and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." (Psalm 37:25).*

**IV. FAMILY TRIUMPHS**

A. Retelling stories of God's faithfulness does several important things:

1. Builds up one another.
2. Strengthens family ties
3. Helps our family, especially children and grandchildren, to see what God is doing right now.

B. EXODUS 10:1-2...

*"Then the Lord said to Moses, Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the Lord."*

C. God's provision - major turning point for Joseph's family.

Can you identify a turning point in your life where God intervened?

What critical need has God met in your family?

What is God doing in your life right now?





**DAVID**  
Finding God in a Crisis  
Pat Wilson

2 Samuel 12:15-23

*After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. 16 David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them.*

*On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate."*

*David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked.*

*"Yes," they replied, "he is dead."*

*Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate.*

*His servants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!"*

*He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."  
NIV*

1 Samuel 13:14 - King David, a man after God's own heart

Suddenly blind-sided by a situation that all of his power, wealth and position could not help.

### Steps David took:

1. He took the problem to God immediately. Pray, pray, pray.

David had a habit, a life style of turning to God for everything. He trusted God in every aspect of life.

When he faced Goliath: 1 Samuel 17:45 "I come to you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel."

When he ran from Saul: Psalm 18:2 "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge."

2. Under his crushing load, he remembered the faithfulness of God in his past. He had trusted in the small things and was now ready to trust in the large.
3. He totally trusted that God could handle the situation.
4. He prayed specifically. He showed his heart, his grief, his sorrow.
5. When the child died David demonstrated his total confidence in the knowledge, the wisdom and the actions of Almighty God. He was at peace.
6. He believed that God knew what he was doing. After praying in deep anguish and the child died he knew that this was what God thought was best.

### Trials Always Teach Us Something.

We should always come away from a trial saying that "although it was hard I know more about God and my relationship with Him."

### David learned :

### Several schools of thought on prayer:

1. "Thy will be done." This sounds good and pious but it can also be used as an excuse to not make a big commitment to commune with God about the issue.
2. Don't pray so much for yourself. That is selfish.

3. Name it and claim. God is obligated to give me whatever I ask for just so long as I use the name of Jesus.

The more I pray the better I get to know my Father and my will comes in alignment with His.

One of the side blessings of a crisis is that God teaches us all about prayer and Him in the midst of it.

TRUST IS NOT EXPECTING GOD TO GRANT OUR EVERY WISH.

TRUST IS KNOWING GOD PERSONALLY AND SINCE HE IS SOVEREIGN AND LOVES US WE TRUST HIS DECISION IN THE MATTER.



# Playing the Whore

Led By Rev. Michael Sims

We all dream of fairy tale relationships. The problem is it only happens in our dreams!

Hosea learned this lesson in a very eye opening, real way.

Hosea 1:1

*The word of the LORD that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.*

Understand the Characters:

Hosea

- Hosea was Israel's last prophet before being conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C.
- Hosea prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam II
- The Northern Kingdom of Israel was on the back end of a very prosperous, peaceful time. This prosperity, unfortunately led to a time of apathy and moral decline in its people. It was to these people God spoke through the Prophet Hosea.

*Hosea 1:2-3 (KJV)*

*The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD. So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.*

Gomer

- Gomer was a prostitute
- She was a worshipper of Baal
- Text gave us no indication that Gomer was a cult prostitute, but rather just a lady who enjoyed the benefits of that lifestyle. She was a woman who intentionally 'played the whore' in order to satisfy her own personal desires and tastes.



2:5 (NLT)

*Their mother is a shameless prostitute and became pregnant in a shameful way. She said, 'I'll run after other lovers and sell myself to them for food and water, for clothing of wool and linen, and for olive oil and drinks.'*

Whoredom (def.)

1. a woman who engages in promiscuous sexual intercourse, usually for money; prostitute; harlot; strumpet.
2. meaning to commit idolatry

Idolatry (def. in Biblical connotation)

1. excessive or blind adoration, reverence, devotion, etc. to anything other than the One True God. This can be the worship of other gods, or making anything else a higher priority than a relationship with, and devotion to Him.

These passages make it easy to become drawn to the character of Gomer. The vileness & evilness of her actions make us stare and shake our heads in disbelief.

If we were to honestly take a look at our lives, our stories, we would have to make the confession that "I am Gomer." Throughout the pages of our stories we have 'played the whore' and committed spiritual adultery.

*Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)*

*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away*

*Romans 3:9-17 (NIV)*

*What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their*

*feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know."*

***Begin journaling the parts of your story where you may have committed spiritual adultery against the Lord (Maybe those days are recent. These can be one time sins or habitual sins that you struggle with.) Write them down and confess them to the Lord:***

This is not a story about Gomer, rather about Hosea. But the larger story is not a story about Hosea, but about God.

Hosea 2:6-13

This passage tells of the justice of God. Time and time again throughout Scripture God tells of His hatred of sin. It is a part of God's character that demands that sinfulness be disciplined and corrected.

How much God hates sin can be seen in the punishment of sin since the very beginning of time. In the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15-19):

- The serpent - condemned to destruction.
- The woman - condemned to submission and pain.
- The man - condemned to toil and tears.
- All men - condemned to death (1 Corinthians 15:22)

***Looking back we can often times see where God has brought something, or allowed something, into our lives as a result of our sin that acts as discipline or rebuke. Ponder back into your times of falling away from God's presence. Identify and write on your journal page some ways you may have seen God act on His just nature in your life.***

Even deeper still, this story is not just one of judgment and justice. It is about the heart of who God is. It is about His passionate love and pursuit of His people.

Hosea visibly loved his wife.

**Despite her past**

*Hosea 1:2*

*2The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredom*

**Hosea made a choice to marry her and provide for her.**

*Hosea 2:8 (NIV)*

*She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold — which they used for Baal.*

God loves us despite our past. Sin is not just a sickness or disease, it is a violation against the law of God. Despite our sinful, dirty, lawless actions and attitudes, God chooses to freely pour His love.

Imagine the pain it would cause you to find out your spouse is having an affair. The hurt, heartache, and pain would be greater than words could describe. Yet it is spiritual adultery that we commit against God all the time and His love is still passionate for us.

*Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV)*

*The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."*

*Jeremiah 31:3 (NIV)*

*The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.*

*Ephesians 2:4-7 (NIV)*

*4But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming*

*ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus*

*1 John 4:10 (NIV)*

*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

*1 John 4:19 (NIV)*

*We love because he first loved us.*

God loves us enough to provide for us (physically & spiritually)

*Matthew 6:25-34*

*John 11:25-26 (NIV)*

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

*John 3:16 (NIV)*

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

***On your journal page describe the point in your life where you began to realize that God intimately loves you. Write your thoughts about His love for you, despite your past and present sinful choices:***

How then should we live? What is an appropriate response for such great expressions of love, compassion, generosity, mercy, and grace?

Scripture says there is but one appropriate response.

*Romans 12:1 (NIV)*

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*

*Mark 12:30 (NIV)*

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'*

*Luke 9:23 (NIV)*

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*

*John 15:4*

*Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me*

True obedience and surrender is not solely compliance, but rather doing on the outside what you long to do on the inside.

Softly and Tenderly

By. Will L. Thompson

Verse 4

O for the wonderful love he has promised,  
promised for you and for me!

Though we have sinned, he has mercy and pardon,  
pardon for you and for me.

Come home, come home;  
ye who are weary come home;  
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
calling, O sinner, come home!

***Close on your journaling page how you desire to react to God's passionate, holy, unchanging love for you. In response to how God expects us to respond, what changes will your life take on?***





## MY STRUGGLE WITH IMBALANCE

Ernie Hack

Life can be a struggle. I find that I am often pulled in different directions – even out of shape. Even my so-called strengths frequently become my weaknesses. With the apostle Paul, I sometimes feel like crying out, “What a wretched man I am!” (cf. Rom. 7:24)

To show you what I face, consider the following realities which we all need in our lives.

### We Need Focus in Life.

This calls for discipline / determination.

Firmness is important to us. So is power.

We speak of purity – about the truth.

(“The truth sets us free,” Jn.8:32)

We need to be righteous.

As with God, we need sternness (Rom 11:22).

He is just. The cross satisfies God’s justice.

Priority living is important.

Catch words: “Hang-in there”

Some say, “Let’s go!”

Or “Let’s roll” (said by 9/11 hero)

Illus.: Serious sportsmen want to win - they’re focused.

BUT . . . it is easy to become selfish with our focus;  
we can easily abuse power when we have it.

We can easily develop a spirit of anger, and become fighters. We can say bad things when we are mad.

Illus.: In sport, some fans even boo their own players.

Illus.: Horrible lady at the trailer park (was focused, but)

Illus.: Ernie trying to get closet built at CBC.

Some are easily irritated, annoyed. Other people get on their nerves. They become feisty.

Some become mean. They may nag, or insist on their way. Or they snap at and bite others (cf. Gal.5:15). Or they scold and cut others off, or they complain.

Some become assertive, but also possessive – obsessed with peripherals (such as sport, a hobby, or things).

In the church, some become legalistic.

### We Also Need Flexibility in Life.

This calls for cooperation / congeniality.

Freedom is also important to us. So is pleasure.

We also speak of unity – about being loving.

(Speak “the truth in love,” Eph. 4:15)

We need to be gracious.

As with God, we also need kindness (Rom. 11:22).

He is loving. The cross clearly shows this.

Friendly living is also important.

Catch words: “Just hang loose”

Or “Let’s hang out”

Or we say, “Whatever”

Illus.: One coach said, “Yes, winning is imp., but not as much as the health of my children.”

BUT . . . it is also easy to become selfish with our flexibility; we can easily abuse pleasure.

We can become “a free-spirit” and be willing to do just about anything; even bad things.

Illus.: Some fans are couch potatoes.

Illus.: Many people today live like animals, sexually speaking. (Some even sleep around – many times.)

Some become irresponsible, characterized by loose thinking and living. They become flighty.

Some become lean – empty or shallow. (Loose-living will do this.) They may excuse their sin, or trivialize and minimize it, or blame others for it.

Some could care less and become, messy, sloppy. Or they are just slow to deal with important things.

In the church, many remain weak, babes, worldly.

J. R. McQuilkin summarizes the pitfalls we face with these realities when he says: *It's always easier to go to an unscriptural extreme than to remain in the midst of biblical tension.*

I find that sometimes I make the mistake of being so focused that I am ready to fight when I shouldn't. At others I am so flexible that I allow messes to develop when I shouldn't. The result is that I am often imbalanced. – even sinful. Frustration sets in, not only for me, but also for my family. Sometimes Joyce threatens me with the notion that she will trade me in for a new model!

This is not the case with those people who are well balanced. Some people make excellent partners, for example. Isaac and Rebekah did. Were they marked by focus and flexibility? They certainly were!

Rebekah was both helpful and respectful. See Genesis 24:10-27, 62-65. Did this call for focus and flexibility? It sure did.

On the other hand, Isaac was both a lover and leader. See Genesis 24:66-67. His sensitivity was part of his loving nature. Also see Genesis 26:1-6. Isaac was one of the three great patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God chose Isaac to give leadership to his people. Did all this call for focus and flexibility? Absolutely!

Isaac and Rebekah were an ideal couple. Note the loyalty they shared. See Genesis 26:34-35. They stood together even when faced with great sorrow. Unlike the other early leaders, we never read of Isaac's pursuit of a second wife, or of his having an affair with another woman.

The wonderful characteristics found in Isaac and Rebekah can also be true of us. She was helpful and respectful. He was a lover and leader. We can experience this too; in various relationships.

What was the great secret to Isaac and Rebekah's success? Genesis 25:11; 26:3, 28-29 gives the answer. The Lord made them successful! But this would never have happened if they were not spiritual people. See how Rebekah demonstrated this in Genesis 24:56-57. And remember Genesis 22:6-12. Both Isaac and Rebekah were spiritual people; both were submissive to the Lord. The same can be true of us.

Clearly, the great "Third Dimension" is needed in our lives. If all we have is focus and flexibility our living remains only two-dimensional. It becomes flat; it stays horizontal.

God tells us that we also need to become vertical in our living. See Micah 6:8. Yes, we need focus and flexibility in life, but most of all, we need fellowship – with the Lord. We need to put first-things-first (cf. Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1; Romans 12:1-2). Most of all we need the Lord Jesus in our lives. We need to fix our eyes on Him (cf. Hebrews 12:2). We really do need Him. Especially see John 1:17.

Ultimately, Christ is the answer to my imbalance; to my sinfulness. Praise God He is His profound, amazing, incredible, immeasurable and glorious gift in my life.

In what ways do you find yourself imbalanced?

In what ways do you need the Lord to bless you; to give you success?



**This is My Story: Sometimes I Offer God Less Than My Best**  
**Charles M. Wilson**

Malachi 1:6-14

6 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name.

"But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?'

7 "You place defiled food on my altar.

"But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?'

"By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. 8 When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty.

9 "Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"-says the LORD Almighty.

10 "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. 11 My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty.

12 "But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' 13 And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty.

"When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD. 14 "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.

NIV

**Introduction:** There are times when we offer God less than our best:

Summer, 1998 - Ridgecrest, North Carolina and Glorieta, New Mexico

1. **The climate of the times.**
  
2. **The main message of the Book of Malachi.**
  
3. **The importance of the message of the Book of Malachi.**
  
4. **Steps to be taken in overcoming the times when we offer God less than our best.**
  - a. I will give my best to Him who gave His best for me.  
Romans 12:1-2.
  
  - b. I will look at a blood stained cross and increase my obedience to Him. Romans 5:8, John 14:15.
  
  - c. I will offer to God no blemished lambs.
  
  - d. I will realize that I am more likely to mess up my life than He is.





Destinations  
Genesis 22:1-19

Steve Murphy



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## **This is My Story: God's Timing is Everything**

### **Charles M. Wilson**

Acts 8:26-29

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road-the desert road-that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." NIV

**Introduction:** There are times when we are in the right place at the right time:

April 19, 1995 – Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

7:00 A.M. - The Mayor's Prayer Breakfast

9:03 A.M. – The bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building

#### **1. Timing is everything.**

- a. September 7, 1964 – The campus of the University of South Carolina
- b. May 30, 1972 – A move from Dentsville to West Columbia

#### **2. The story of a deacon named Philip.**

- a. Philip was led by an angel of the Lord.
- b. What Philip discovered.
- c. What Philip sensed.

d. What Philip did.

e. What Philip said and proclaimed.

f. What Philip saw happen.

g. What Philip experienced.

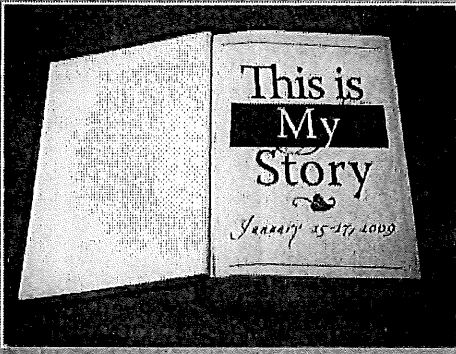
**3. Tracing the hand of God in our lives.**

a. Jeremiah 1:4-10.

b. Romans 11:33-36

**What is your story where God's timing is concerned?**





My  
Story  
Journal Entry

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**“The Return”**  
**Journey out of Lo-Debar:**  
**2 Samuel 9:1-13**  
Larry Scott

Each of our “stories” has many individual aspects that are specific to our journey, our life. But, there are often common experiences that link us all together. These experiences intersect with other people’s experience and are common to humanity. Even though we know this, it is “strange” that we tend to feel alone in our struggles, isolated, believing no one has ever had to deal with the issues we are facing. *We tend to close ourselves off from others the “darker life becomes.”*

*“ One of the greatest hurdles someone can cross is to realize that I am not alone in the darkness and there are others who can help me. –Why do we isolate ourselves from each other in the times we need somebody most? If I had realized this at a younger age perhaps my life would have turned out differently”*

*quote from the diary of serial killer  
Jeffrey Dahmer*

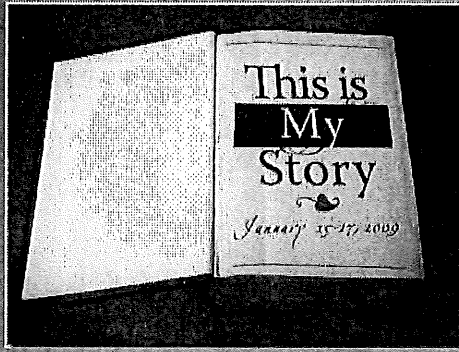
**\* One thing we learn from King David’s example is that God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others. List some ways that God has blessed you – and how can you use that to bless others?**

**Can you think of a time where you have been angry or frustrated with God over something going on in your life? Write about it below:  
How did you deal with / resolve your “feelings” toward God? If you haven’t what steps do you need to take to accomplish this?**

**Can you identify and describe a “LO-Debar type experience” (desolate, despairing place) in your own story? What “baggage are you still carrying from that difficult chapter in your story?**

**Today the King has summoned YOU. He has invited you to leave that place behind and come to His table. There is a place with your name engraved on it. What is it going to take for you PERSONALLY, to accept His grace and come out of the darkness to the King’s table: You need a Mephibosheth grace experience:**

- **Need to let go of something in my past-**
- **Truly forgive someone who has wounded me**
- **Forgive myself**
- **Accept his grace by realizing that there is nothing I can do to change my situation – I must choose to fully trust the king’s goodness and mercy**



# My Story

## Journal Entry

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# My Story of Hope

Rich Wilson

זאת אָשִׁיב אֶל-לִבִּי, עַל-כֵּן אוֹחִיל. {ס}	21	This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. {S}
חֲסֵדֵי יְהוָה כִּי לֹא-תִמְנוּ, כִּי לֹא-קָלוּ רַחֲמָיו.	22	Surely the LORD'S mercies are not consumed, surely His compassions fail not.
הֵם חֲדָשִׁים, לְבֹקְרִים, רַבָּה, אֲמוּנָתְךָ.	23	They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness.
חֲלָקֵי יְהוָה אָמְרָה נַפְשִׁי, עַל-כֵּן אוֹחִיל לוֹ. {ס}	24	'The LORD is my portion', saith my soul, 'Therefore will I hope in Him.' {S}
טוֹב יְהוָה לְקַוֹּי, לְנַפְשׁ תִּדְרָשׁוּ.	25	The LORD is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him.
טוֹב וְיָחִיל וְדוּמָם, לְתַשׁוּעַת יְהוָה.	26	It is good that a man should quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.



The Prophet Jeremiah is responsible for a significant chunk of the Old Testament. God used this prophet in a terribly difficult time when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians.

Jeremiah earned the name the “Weeping Prophet.” The situation in his time was devastating. Every day was filled with unspeakable pain. As we read the book of Jeremiah and the book of Lamentations we get a glimpse into the heart of this great man.

Even with all the pain, Jeremiah found reason for hope. How could this prophet have real hope? His own words tell the story:

## Tough

Jeremiah was a man called of God but in no way did that mean his life was easy. God’s call and Jeremiah’s heart combined for one tough life. What factors caused such difficulty for Jeremiah?

### ***A Tough Job- but God still has a plan.***

Jeremiah 1:5 (NIV)

***“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”***

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet of God. Jesus noted that he would be killed just like the prophets of old. A prophet: it probably doesn’t get more difficult than that.

Tough jobs  
Tough callings  
Tough assignments

**Extremely Difficult Times- but God's hand was still with him.**

Jeremiah 1:9-10 (NIV)

**Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."**

Can God's hand still be with you  
even when things are difficult?

**Really Difficult People- but God was still in all this.**

Jeremiah 7:27 (NIV)

**"When you tell them all his, they will not listen to you; when you call to them, they will not answer.**

The world would be a great place  
if it wasn't for all the people.

## **The Sound of Discouragement**

Jeremiah was the Weeping Prophet and this is clearly reflected in his writings. Lamentations is filled with challenging verses revealing deep emotion. Listen to his heart:

**The loss of hope**

Lamentations 3:17-18 (NIV)

<sup>17</sup> **I have been deprived of peace;  
I have forgotten what prosperity is.**  
<sup>18</sup> **So I say, "My splendor is gone  
and all that I had hoped from the LORD."**

Peace, prosperity, splendor. . . all gone.  
All I had hoped for. . . gone.

What's gone?

Joy, laughter, peace, concern, love. . .

**Remembering past events**

Lamentations 3:19 (NIV)

<sup>19</sup> **I remember my affliction and my wandering,  
the bitterness and the gall.**

Affliction: "times of suffering"

Wandering: "place to place with no particular plan"  
"homeless"

Bitterness: "wormwood," "used figuratively here, meaning bitter."

***Profound sadness***

Lamentations 3:20 (NIV)

***20 I well remember them,  
and my soul is downcast within me.***

“Downcast”. . . Bowed down, crouched over. Grief. Under the strain of mourning.

The Psalmist felt some of the same things. He even used the word, “downcast in his Psalm.”

**Psalm 42**

***<sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while men say to me all day long,  
“Where is your God?”***

***<sup>4</sup> These things I remember  
as I pour out my soul:  
how I used to go with the multitude,  
leading the procession to the house of God,  
with shouts of joy and thanksgiving  
among the festive throng.***

***<sup>5</sup> Why are you downcast, O my soul?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and <sup>6</sup> my God.  
My soul is downcast within me;  
therefore I will remember you  
from the land of the Jordan,  
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.***

<sup>7</sup> ***Deep calls to deep  
in the roar of your waterfalls;  
all your waves and breakers  
have swept over me.***

<sup>8</sup> ***By day the Lord directs his love,  
at night his song is with me—  
a prayer to the God of my life.***

Even in this challenging Psalm there is still hope. Psalm 42 stills points toward hope. Jeremiah came to the same realization:

Lamentations 3:21 (NIV)

<sup>21</sup> ***Yet this I call to mind  
and therefore I have hope:***

What could give Jeremiah real hope in difficult times?

## **Foundations for Hope**

Jeremiah could not find hope in his circumstances. Jeremiah did not get a new job. The people of Israel and Judah suddenly did not become obedient. The only foundation of hope was the Lord God Himself.

Jeremiah focused his thoughts (verse 21) on three fundamental, foundational attributes of God. He found bedrock in the shifting sands of his time.

Lamentations 3:22-23 (NIV)

<sup>22</sup> ***Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.***

<sup>23</sup> ***They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.***

Foundation 1: The Great Love of God



Foundation 2: The Unfailing Compassion of God

Foundation 3: The Consistent Faithfulness of God

## What Are You Asking Yourself?

What are you asking?

Often our questions are both unanswerable and unproductive?  
Why is he treating me that way?

Even after we arrive at an answer, what good does it do? Even if we know “why” will it really make a difference? Usually not.

What does it change? What does it improve? How does it make a real difference in my situation?

Psalm 42:5

<sup>5</sup> *Why are you downcast, O my soul?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and <sup>6</sup> my God.  
My soul is downcast within me;  
therefore I will remember you  
from the land of the Jordan,  
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*

### The Right Question

*“Why are you downcast my soul?”*

This question is both answerable and productive.

You are asking yourself the hard question. You are asking yourself the question you can address. You are asking the question you can begin to answer.

### **Godly “Self Talk”**

Even the psalmist reasoned with his own thinking by saying, “***Put your hope in the Lord.***”

It is as if he is saying to himself, “Come on! Put your hope and trust in God!”

### **Contrary Response**

***“I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”***

This response does not make sense unless there is great faith and trust in the attributes of God. He is loving, compassionate and faithful. . .okay, I can praise Him knowing and believing this!

### **Biblical Truth as a Defense**

***“Therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon.”***

Listen to your questions. . .where are they taking you? Ask yourself, “Is that really where I want to go?”

## **What Are You Saying to Yourself?**

Now listen carefully to what you are saying to your self.

Often our own words fuel our discouragement, sadness, bitterness or anger.

When something gets in your head it can tumble around like a towel in a dryer.

Lamentations 3:24a

***“I say to myself. . .”***

You listen to yourself more than you think. Jeremiah had a moment with himself; a conversation with himself. As we will see, he reminded himself of what he knew to be true about God.

Often what we say to ourselves are lies. Over time we begin to believe the lies. What if we reminded ourselves of truth? When our minds are attacked with lies we must take them captive.

What are you saying to yourself? Listen carefully.

## God's Indispensable Provision

What happens when we put our hope in God? Does he disappoint us? Does he fail? No! Because of his love, compassion and faithfulness, He responds to us. How does He respond? Jeremiah tells us three responses.

Lamentations 3:24-26 (NIV)

<sup>24</sup> ***I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him."***

<sup>25</sup> ***The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;***

<sup>26</sup> ***it is good to wait quietly  
for the salvation of the LORD.***

Response 1: He will be our portion  
A share, an allotment

Response 2: He will be good to us

Response 3: He will provide salvation

## What Do We Do?

Jeremiah gives four actions we can take to find hope in difficulty. Each of these actions is connected directly to God. These are not things done independent of God but interdependent with God. They are not easy but they do work.

Action 1: Wait for God

Action 2: Hope in Him

Action 3: Seek Him

Action 4: Be Quiet Before Him

## **With God, There Is Always Hope**

Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)

***<sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.***

This journey can be so difficult and painful. No matter where we are or what is happening, God is still writing.

Even in difficulty God is writing into your story perseverance, character and hope. Even in the darkest and most difficult chapters of your life, there is hope from Him and in Him.

You can trust God with your life's story. Verse 5 reminds us that every word is written with great love.

"Hope does not disappoint us."

