

WRITING & HEARING THE STORIES OF OUR TRAUMA

RESTORATION OF THE HEART FOLLOW-UP

HOW TO WRITE YOUR STORY

These are some guidelines to writing the stories of the “heart-wounding” traumas of your life. Steps 1-8 help you write the story, but do not ignore steps 9-15 which helps you process it.

1. MAKE A LIST OF YOUR “WOUNDING EVENTS” AND WRITE ABOUT THEM ONE AT A TIME

- These are specific events that happened not seasons of life. Be as specific as possible.

2. IF YOU CAN’T REMEMBER IT’S OK, WRITING WILL HELP YOU REMEMBER

- If you can’t remember the details, don’t skip over it. Writing will remind you of things you’ve forgotten.
- Use a picture of “younger you” to prompt your memory, if you’d like.

3. WRITE THE “STORY” OF ONLY ONE EVENT, NOT A PERIOD OF TIME

- You don’t need to revisit everything at once. One at a time is best.

4. YOU NEED TO WRITE LONGHAND, NO TYPING!

- Keep it to 3 sides of 8.5”x 11” paper or just a few journal pages. This will help you stay focused.

5. DESCRIBE THE FEEL OF THE STORY

- Paint the picture with words: context, tone, mood, the time/place of event.
- Use your senses: What did it look like? Smell like? Sound like? Feel like?

6. INCLUDE CHARACTERS & DIALOGUE

- Try to be as specific as possible with what was said and who said it. Even if it’s not exact the important thing is how you experienced what was said and how you remember it.

7. WRITE USING THE VOICE OF YOUNGER YOU

- Use the words you would have used when it happened. If you were 9 write the way a 9-year-old would talk.
- The more you use “adult language” in your story the less connected you are to it, which stunts healing.

8. INCLUDE YOUR EMOTIONS LIKE ANGER, FEAR, HATE, SADNESS, EMBARRASSMENT

- This isn’t the time to be “reasonable” with your emotions, this is where you need to let your younger self have the emotions they had.

9. IDENTIFY INJUSTICE AND LET YOURSELF GRIEVE

- Let yourself be specific about the what happened to you that shouldn’t have happened.
- Be specific and name what you lost that day (e.g. security, trust, self-esteem, safety).
- Do not tell yourself you shouldn’t care about what you lost, let yourself grieve it.

10. TRY TO LET IT GO AND LET PEOPLE “OUT OF JAIL”

- Usually these events put someone in a “personal prison.” It could be the person who hurt you, the person who abandoned you, or even yourself.
- Look for who you blame and have compassion on them. Let them out of jail, it’s not doing anyone any good.

11. READ YOUR STORY TO A CARING, EMPATHETIC, SAFE PERSON (SEE BELOW)

- Let someone in to your story to bear witness to your wounds. This isn’t someone who will disciple you on how you feel, but someone with whom you feel safe being honest. The next page has guidelines on story-listening.

12. FIND THE WOUND, THE LIE, AND THE AGREEMENT IN YOUR STORY

- Be as specific as you can here. The more specific you can be, the more targeted your healing can be.

13. FIND COMPASSION FOR YOUNGER YOU NOT CONTEMPT OR CRITICISM

- Don’t blame, or hate, or talk about what you could have done or should have done.
- Let yourself be compassionate on yourself. (e.g. “I was only nine years old and very very scared...”)

14. INTEGRATE “YOU, NOW” AND “YOU, THEN” WITH VALIDATION AND GIVING “YOU, THEN” A VOICE

- This is where you validate the feelings your “younger you” has and let your adult self process those feelings.
- You don’t dismiss “younger you” and you don’t belittle them either.
- Imagine yourself now speaking to younger you then, what does younger you need to hear?

15. PRAY AGGRESSIVELY AGAINST YOUR ENEMY

- Go on the offensive! Healing doesn’t stop at journal pages.
- Pray aggressively for you and God to attack the Enemy and his lies and your agreement with the lies.

HOW TO LISTEN TO SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY

Step 11 of writing your story asks you to read your story in the presence of someone who is caring, empathetic, and safe. This is an important part of healing our traumas, but you don't have to be a licensed counselor to be the caring, empathetic, and safe person that your loved ones need to heal. Below are a few guidelines for bearing witness to the trauma of other's lives.

1. PREPARE YOUR HEART AND THE SPACE FOR LISTENING

- Someone is inviting you into the sacred ground of their heart, remove your shoes and honor their story.
- Prepare to be fully connected to the storyteller and their story. They deserves your full attention, so give it.
- Turn off phones, noises, distractions, anything that will disrupt this time.
- Your job is to witness their trauma, grieve with them, and validate their steps to healing.

2. DO NOT INTERRUPT

- Let the storyteller tell the story. Don't stop them to point out an interesting thought.
- Don't say this reminds you of a scripture. Don't point out how unreasonable or unfair they were being.
- Focus on feeling what they felt in the story.

3. IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THEIR STORY

- Listen for these elements
 - Characters, Plot, Context, and Endings
 - GAPS in the story: they may point to places where the storyteller may need to reflect more
 - CONTRADICTIONS. These may point to places that need to be addressed and engaged with kindness
 - REPETITION. They are clues to the heartache of the storyteller and show what they hold most important.
 - Listen for SUMMARY STATEMENTS. They reveal how the storyteller has come to understand themselves and the their world.
- You don't need to take notes, just listen, feel with them, and walk with them in this story.

4. AT THE END, THANKS, VALIDATION, AND EMPATHY

- This person did not have to invite you into their heart, but they did. Sincerely thank them for letting you in.
- No matter how deep or how "well" you think the storyteller told their story, affirm how incredible it is for them to revisit these traumas. Find whatever they did well and praise that.
- Your job is not to fix, to heal, or to point out what they missed — your job is to grieve with them. Your job is to climb down into the hole with them and feel what they felt.
- Comments like, "I'm sorry, that must've been tough," doesn't usually validate the wounds.
 - Instead, reach into your empathic grief you've built while listening and try something like, "my heart is breaking for you. That shouldn't have happened to you. I'm so so sorry."
- **DO NOT SAY:** "I can relate, this one time..." This is their story-time not yours. Yours can come later. Your story is important, but now is for them. Your pain may be similar but it won't be the same.

5. ASK THEN INVITE THE STORYTELLER IN FURTHER REFLECTION

- Typically, there are gaps, contradictions, or incompleteness in our stories especially when we are just starting.
- When the storyteller is ready, ask them if they would be willing to reflect further on some things. If not, stop. If yes then proceed. Don't force it.
- If someone hasn't completed steps 9-15 from "writing your story" then they risk telling their story without healing. Just telling the story makes us relive the trauma, but healing comes with integration and agreement breaking.
- If they are willing to engage, simply ask a question from the "writing story" steps that they haven't expanded on. e.g. "Do you feel like you were able to grieve what you lost?", "Were you able to identify what you lost?", "Is there anyone you think you could let out of jail?", "What would younger you have needed to hear?", "DO you see any lies that you've agreed with?"

6. PRAY AGGRESSIVELY TOGETHER

- End together by praying on the offensive against Satan. Engage in spiritual warfare against your enemy. Invite Jesus into their heart to heal the wounds, drive out the lies, and break agreements.