

## Chapter 5 (stories)

*You grieve you learn; you choke you learn. You laugh you learn; you choose you learn  
You pray you learn; you ask you learn; you live you learn – Alanis Morrissette*

We all have wonderful stories to tell. I was just writing a blog about leaving a spouse. I was thinking of all the reasons that people leave. Each person is affected by their own stories. Yet, each time someone leaves a heart is broken. A story is written. These stories shape us. Unfortunately, it's either for the good or bad. I have quite often wondered if people are a waste of time. There is so much disappointment and damage done by those we put trust in. Yet, I have to remind myself of the people that have made my day. Each one of them made my life better. No matter who you write a story with there will always be perspective.

We are affected by people. I think it needs repeating. They will affect us! I have a little blog called "Be my inspiration." It's about two sentences. Why so small? I want to be direct and to the point. We should inspire others. Conversely, we should let people inspire us. The whole point of the Bible is to be inspired by God the Father, the Son Jesus, and through the Holy Spirit. The men and women in the Bible have inspired us through their stories. We can learn something from anything. People we meet in life do affect us. Usually, it's through their stories.

The Bible has an interesting view on the words *tare* and *wheat*. Matthew 13:29 "*But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.'*" The wheat represents the good. The tares are the bad. Sometimes we live too close to the tares. At times I look like wheat while in other moments I'm defiantly a tare. I guess what I'm getting at is stories. Our story does get mixed within other stories. The wheat love to help the tares. These tares love to antagonize the wheat too. You are never alone in this world. You're either a tare or wheat to someone within their story.

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There are amazing events like a concert that shapes you. I have never been the same since my first concert. I loved it. It's possible I've made a life out of experiencing concerts. In 1979, Cincinnati Ohio experienced a concert in the wrong way. Eleven people were crushed while entering a Who concert. I know several people who have been affected by divorce in different ways. Moments in time like concerts and marriage become part of the stories we write. Stories that we tell to others. Sometimes nothing is said. You just know that person is carrying or wearing their story. Quite often we can see how a life story has changed you.

I had a teacher change my life around. I wish it had been all the way around. Yet, he made a difference at the time. For some reason I ended up behind the garage with my brothers' friend. She and I were alone, staring into each other's eyes in the moonlight. I can't remember why we ended up there. Yet, there we stood. A kiss turned into marriage and divorce. There are certain events that plot the course we are on. They are carried forward by winds of change. Yet, there we go, forever changed by a chance event. I have heard of someone being found dead in a blizzard just outside their door. They walked around and around but never found the door just a few feet before them. A split moment in time can make all the difference.

We need things to happen so stories can unfold. Events are life markers. A certain tragedy or success means something to us. Why? We need stories to plot where we have been, and where we're headed. Unfortunately, these people, things, and events touch us dramatically. We are forever changed. They make up the stories we hold. At times they even define us. Yet, let's stop there. Define us? To me, that is pretty strong language. A rape defines you? A lottery defines you? Yet, so many people get stuck in their story as if it's the only one they own. I love sports stars retelling locker-room stories. They are the memories that hold fantastic points in time. They should; however, not define you.

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I'd like to believe were not defined by stories. People all over the world overcome the stories that have tried and shape them. Every day, people overcome cancer and heartbreak. I would even dare say they use them as a battle cry. Joni Ericson Tata overcame being paralyzed. Rick Hanson did the same. Healed? No, but they used their story to inspire others. Ironically, these two became a poster of their tragedy. A way to overcome. Yet, they have a story to tell. Some alcoholics die from drinking. A tragic story killed them inside. The Darwin Awards are given to people who found dumb ways to die. They apparently were consumed within the moment. Unable to see the looming disaster. A story in the making. Will we get past the stories we weave? Many have said, yes, we can!

I listen to crime podcasts. One of them is called Holes and Jenson: The Murder Squad. They have a motto: *don't be an irony*. I think it points to stories. Don't become a talking point on the Darwin awards. Does someone have to say they knew you were trouble? I was told I should not marry my first wife. In divorce I became an irony. A drunk loses everything to the bottle. Then they die from alcohol poisoning. We say *go figure, I knew that would happen*, or *don't be an irony*. Our stories can consume us. Yet, to the survivors and thrivers: they made new stories out of their fire.

We should not label our lives by a single narrative. I know that Rick Hanson is forever labeled as the *Man in motion*. Yet, in his personal life there are many more stories. New adventures to be told. I just heard the story of Yeardeley Smith. She is the voice of Lisa on the Simpsons. One year she was asked to do an event. These voice actors do many such events to promote the show and meet the fans. This one show in particular was held to dedicate a mural in one of the many towns called Springfield.

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Before she arrived, Yeardeley asked a simple question: Do you have security? It's a small town! The promoters said they would assign her a detective body guard. Over the weekend they fell in love like a hallmark movie. She has been defined by Lisa Simpson for 25 years. An event, one weekend, changed her life within that Simpson narrative. We should be more than one story. We know Gilligan on TV is Bob Denver but what other stories does he have. If I met you, what defines you? Are you part of a bigger story like Yeardeley Smith? Could you be young and still crafting your life stories? Clearly, there are more stories to tell at sixty-five years old too!

Let's go down a path by recounting three stories. Are they a waste of time or part of a bigger narrative? I am sure I could recount hundreds of stories from all kinds of sources. Instead, I want to tell a few tales that I know something about. I have sat there as an armchair quarterback watching them. One of the stories is about me! I know bad relationships. I have seen wasted time trying to make troubled relationships work. I do believe there is no wasted time in learning, but that is subjective. Yet, did you need the pain and aggravation. Did you need to learn the hard way? Two paths! Why did you take the one you did? You chose and you walked it. Nobody was putting a gun to the heads of the people in their stories. Let's dive into the first.

Jenny grew up in a decent family surrounded by great Christians. Her parents were devoted church people. This is what a Christian family does: a life of serving and giving of one's self to a cause. This family had a moral code. They loved God and loved people. It wouldn't be hard to believe that mom and dad tried to instill their values on this little girl. Parents help set up the pages in their children. Pages that each child will write their story on.

Jenny was brought up right, but (unfortunately) she had some complicated attributes. She was very pretty. Her smile could win a war. Jenny could win friends and woo lovers directly because of her outgoing personality and love for life. This was a chic magnet in reverse. This

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chic was the magnet! What did her parents do wrong? Nothing really, they raised a good little girl. To this day she is kind, nice, pretty, and resourceful. Jenny also had a second unfortunate attribute. She wanted to be nice. Her parents taught her well. Sometimes children take what their parents give them and throw it away.

*“I don’t want to be like my parents.”*

*“I don’t care for the way they lived their lives.”*

That was not Jenny. She adored her parents. Yet, she made a few silent vows.

*“I will honor God like my parents.”*

*“I will be devoted to my husband.”*

*“I will serve others at the cost of my own needs.”*

These were Christian things. It is what good church people do. I suspect it would be horror to Jenny to even think about divorce; being single late in life; or even being served by others. Her needs did not outweigh your needs. So, it was for Jenny. Into her teen years this little girl began to grow and change. She was a lot like Snow White. This sweet little girl became a beautiful young woman. Jenny had one more unfortunate thing happen to her: her parents sent her to public school.

As it goes, friends are impressionable. Our best intentions are usually tested by novel ideas. If you made a vow to serve like your parents then the word “no” does not really exist. If you made a vow to love like Jesus then turning the other cheek is paramount. Public school does not hold Christian values. The students that attend this type of school do not live out Christian values. The real danger to Jenny was proximity. The values of the world are ideological. Love, live, care, and be nice. The Christian values almost line up with love, pray, serve, and be like Jesus. Close but no cigar.

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Yet, there are proximity mines too. A nice boy meets a nice girl. Love is love right? Being accepted at school is a thing. As a teenager, thinking you are smarter than your parents is a thing too. What if Jenny thought that love is tolerance, compromise, and compassion? The Jesus things, right? So, the boy tells the girl he loves her. That he agrees with what Jesus stands for. Why can't we play around in bed? I love you. I care for you. There is a theme in Jenny's vows: serve others, deny yourself, and have compassion. That led Jenny straight into bed with her boyfriend as a teenager. It's not the view her parents held, but Jenny could control this.

I'd like to say that Jenny got pregnant. I'd like to say that she wised up. The problem with Jenny is that pride was mixed in with the vows. A vow is only as good as your commitment to it. Your pride is only as good as your commitment to it too. Jenny's boyfriend David loved to party. He was not a Christian kid. He drank, cheated, and ruled her roost. Jenny allowed her pride and vows to rule her roost too. Soon enough, school ended and marriage began. This is what happens when pride crashes into your vows. You begin to lose sight of who you are and what you value.

Year after year repeated the same record like a phonograph needle hitting a scratch. Just pop, skip, and repeat. Jenny looked at her parent's life. Why don't I have that? She looked at her church friends and wondered if they too, had to live with everything a Christian wasn't. Yet, she believed. Jenny plastered the house with God. David vowed to change and she vowed to fight for them. As it was, David traveled with his job. It's totally convenient to see another woman in places your wife is not. Jenny gained some weight. It fueled her depression and David's infidelity. Can you see the mess building?

Then came the week of hell. Jenny thought it would be cool to surprise David on one of his trips. The other woman was surprised too. He was mad. Jenny was mad. The other woman was mad. What a mad world. As it was Jenny hitched a ride home across the country with a

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friend of David's. She slept with him all the way home too. The Christian girl busted her vows, integrity, and the good name of Jesus all in one week. I tell this story for a reason. Was Jenny's journey a waste of time? I would love to discuss the success and downfall of Jenny and David. Hold that thought! I want it to sink in. Let your mind wrestle with wasted time. Let's pound into story number two. The Story of Mark.

It must be tough coming from a Christian home. It's probably the best place to grow up, but the demands of being good could be daunting at times. Yet, you're not that prepared for life outside the Christian bubble. Mark had a great home. His dad was a man's man. There was nothing they could not achieve. I always said that Mark was King Midas. Everything he touched turned to gold, except his Christianity. Mark was as devoted to Jesus as it comes. I love to call church the place of silent sins. If there are sins within, they certainly don't want to talk about them. The church tends to be eerily silent about anything that would tarnish the good name of Jesus, that includes sin.

So, it goes for the Christian boy named Mark. He was lucky enough to meet a girl in high school that came from a good Christian home too. Yet, here's the thing. Remember the silent sin part? I can smoke pot, sleep with a girl before marriage, and party all I want. If you love Jesus then silent sins are forgiven right? This boy could turn anything into gold. I was astounded how much he talked about the church and Jesus while high and drunk. I guess he was the poster boy for keeping church and state apart. Hide the sin and pray in public.

In comes Angie. This little beauty was not the cutest girl on the planet, but Mark had checkboxes. He desired a woman who loved Jesus and went to church. Mark also desired a girl who loved silent sins. Unfortunately for him this girl also had the Midas touch. She could silently sin with the best of them. Angie knew how to lie. She was rather good at it. Mark new how to lie

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too. Both of them went to church, sinned like the devil, and turned everything into gold. What could possibly go wrong?

He married Angie and they moved in together right out of high school. This was the golden couple. He had a knack for selling things. She could try anything and succeed. The problem was this. Angie was easily bored. Mark believed everything was heaven made. Are silent sins heaven made? If everything you do is gold then God must be happy with you. It's the prosperity gospel. Yet, it was fool's gold. Angie cheated on Mark. She played scam after scam. Mark let everything slide because God was good. The good Lord will work it out in the end. They were the holy golden couple!

Eventually she left him. Then Angie got pregnant with another man's baby. She came back to Mark because Mark was faithful to the Lord. He too can weave a really good lie. Mark told everyone that it was his child. The happy couple reunited. The silent sins were buried for four years! Mark created a business; Angie created more scams. The golden couple built a new life on the back of old sins. The problem was that Christianity is built on resurrection. Mark and Angie could not keep the silent sins buried.

Let's finish Angie's story first. She cheated on him again. My dad always told me leopards can't change their spots. Mark begged Angie to come back yet again. After the second infidelity she left Mark and the church for good. Then Angie (in her Christian kindness) took him to court for all he had. Within months Angie began new career ventures and was building a little empire. In time Angie married a third time to a rather big bouncer type guy. They were the new golden couple. She even posted on valentine's day that he was the best thing that ever happened to her. As things will go, three weeks later she left him sighting abuse. Go figure!



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She is a nice girl. There are always worse people. Angie now lives a simple life alone. No house, no alimony, and a fledging career. To top this off, she is now north of fifty-five. It seems like a fantastic life traveling, loving, and living. Yet, I have seen the lines on her face. The worn-down look. All the gold is gone. If living simply makes her happy now then I am glad. Yet, simple could have made her happy thirty years before. Was all the cheating and wasted time worth it?

Back to Mark. He still believed that he could make anything into gold. In time, he visited an Asian country while doing the Lord's work. There he met a local woman who was doing the Lords work too. They fell in love within a few weeks. Ahh, the Lord will provide. He brought her and her children back to his country. The problem was this: these two countries were night and day. His new Christian bride had never experienced northern Canadian winters. What is a poor foreign girl to do in a strange land?

On Mark goes preaching the good word and turning everything into gold. Mark also continued to preach that this woman was far superior to his previous wife (big mistake). Mark liked to go off hunting and working as he always had. Dad had taught him well. This particular winter was bitterly cold. Mark wasn't there for his new wife as much as she thought he would. In time, she left him. As with all gold makers, if at first you don't succeed, then try at-least three times. Mark went off to Pastoral university while his children became a hot mess. He eventually married again. Was his last thirty plus years a waste of time? How hard was he trying to turn the love of the Lord into gold? Maybe he wasted a ton of time trying to love people and gold at the same time?

So, what happens to kids when God does not rule your house? Let's now, throw me under the bus. Who needs God? I grew up in a house that mentioned God but we never knew what that

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was. I heard a few songs and my mom mentioned that she went to church as a kid. Besides a few brushes with church, there was nothing Christian in my life. My house was a twisted tale of dysfunction and abuse. An odd sense of sex and parenting confused me and my brothers to this day. Sin was not secret in my life. I would say that sin was normal living. Make your way in life doing whatever you want. The story that was being forged in me was looking more like a horror film every day. Still, I had an ok childhood. I learned humor and there is never anything wrong with that. Yet, dysfunction has a way of messing with a child's mind when it comes to relationships.

I had a few mottos. One of them was that I wanted to be a number. I know, it sounds weird. Yet, the most successful people all worked in tall buildings with thousands of people. They went to university and owned 2.3 cars. That sounded good to me. Within thousands of workers, you're just a number, but a successful one. I also believed that devotion to people is paramount. Be who they needed you to be. Conform to the world and you will win the world. Where did that come from?

You see my parents were pretty picky. I was not like the other boys. In fact, they wished I was like the other boys! You know, the guys who stared on football and hockey teams. What they got was a book worm, and a music guy. Plus, I loved girls more than school. I know it's hard to work in an office building as a number without an education. To make matters worse I wanted to try stuff. I became a DJ with my own equipment. I decided to be a goalie in hockey. There was nothing I would not try. I loved being odd, and was all over the map listening to obscure music and following obscure paths. Not exactly what my parents ordered. In many ways I didn't feel special directly because my parents felt the same way. I was becoming just a number ironically.

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To make matters worse, my parents loved to pick on what I did not do well. They never taught me anything except to loathe myself. By the way, I do that really well. Crushed self-esteem is not a great attribute to be good at. As time went by my childhood ended. To make a long story longer. My parents never pushed me to be good at school. They were too busy divorcing and venturing off with others mates. Tough to be enthralled about going to university when your rudderless and loathing yourself. I thought university was for them. The smart people. The other boys my dad wished I was.

I can self-pity party with the best of them. So, of course I met a girl that was bashed by her mother all the time too. The perfect fit. Accept she learned to bash from you know who: her mother. Her father worked in the trades just like my dad did. Yep, men's, men. Did I fit in that key hole? Not! Yet, the rebellious girl marries the boy with no ambition. I just did whatever life threw at me. As in my home life, I just took it. In my first marriage I just took it. Let's face it, I'm in people's way. A self-loathing pilon, a number What could I do to make them like me, love me, and care for me? Nothing because abusers are never satisfied. The moral of this story is the mirror. I didn't care much for that guy (in the mirror) at all.

Why am I writing about wasted time? It's because between eighteen to forty-three years of age I wallowed in confusion. There is a ton of time in between loathing and discovery. Is it wasted time? Yes, I gained two great boys. Yes, my second wife is perfect for me. Yes, I am fairly happy. Yet, what could someone do with an extra twenty-five years. I got to tell you; life is short. Messing around with twenty-five years is not a great idea. Ok, one more quick story.

I read a story of two young people who fell in love. Both of them were extremely devoted to God. Here we go again. No, this is mildly different. He wanted to be a missionary. She wanted to be his wife. Yet, they both made a vow of chastity before marriage. I get it. Yet, through all

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the love letters and steamy cold showers they drifted in and out of each other's lives. Finally, they chose to marry. He felt it was time. She said it was about time. Then he went off on a mission's trip to visit some cannibals. Guess what cannibals like to eat?

I said it would be short. Ok, let's talk about these stories. Are the lives of these people wasted time? With our last couple they were dating for around five years. I believe they were not married that long. Is it five years wasted time waiting when your clearly able to marry? Is evangelizing cannibals a good idea when you're the dinner? With three of our stories, I'm mildly confused. I get devotion to God. I totally get waiting on God. Yet, at times, God places the information out there as clear as skip the dishes for cannibals. Did they say grace before dinner?

Take a good look at the story of Jenny. Her parents laid out the good path. She wanted to make her own. She is still with her husband. Jenny is almost fifty. Will she be staring at being single after fifty because leopards don't change their spots? How admirable is it to fight for a marriage for well over twenty years? Why not have twenty years of bliss? I find it odd that we tell people to fight the good fight. Yeah, fight for a person that clearly has no regard for you. Somehow, we find honor in being a victim. A victim wasting twenty plus years trying to make it right. Do you know what does not make the news that often? Those rare couples that had good marriages. Those who loved the other so much they wouldn't dare ruin it. Yes, and those who decided enough is enough of wasted time. They left to find their life with what little they had left. We hardly ever hear about those people.

This is my take on story number 2. Mark is so consumed with getting it right. Yet, Angie made it easy. It was easy to blame her. Yet, did Mark look under the hood. Is his kid's calamity her fault too? Were twenty plus years paying spousal support worth fighting for her? Yes, we need lessons to learn. Should we make sure there are lessons to learn? I though finding the happy

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life was the goal. Is fighting for a rotten marriage a goal? Is it the noble, honorable, and righteous cause? Or, is it how we waste time?

Let's look back at my life. Is twenty-five years looking for me worth those twenty-five years of being lost? Here is my take on it. People look back and say the cup is half full. Look at the beautiful children despite the failed marriage. Look at how much we've grown. Yet, the path of heartache is considerable. The lost time and money are daunting. How many tears must be shed? J Vernon McGee was having a conversation with a man who believes that you must cry to accept Jesus. I get it. Yet, J Vernon always asks how many tears is enough? One, ten-, or twenty-five-years' worth?

I just want you to take a good look at your life. Take the time to re-read the four stories. How does yours line up? Have you had the good life? Why was it good? It's ok to look at your past stories and learn from them. We need to see how we treated our time. My whole point is focused on "the now." From this moment forward what will you write in your story? Would you purposely go out and cause calamity to learn? No, we tell our kids to look both ways directly because we want them to avoid harm. What story are you writing now for the sake of the honorable, noble, and to keep your pride and vows intact? I know that I should have worked on me instead of getting married. Having that one girl in the world of four billion girls was a mistake. There were better fish. Yet, I wanted what I wanted. Did I abandon my hopes and dreams just to have one in four billion? Was twenty-five years of fighting worth the effort? What if I began to look at life in a different way?

The problem is that we get caught up in our story. Oh, this could be the one. The magical story of love. It's like Lord of the rings: *An unexpected meeting*. Frodo wanted the adventure. Yet, the trials cost him. He was never the same again. We love to say he won. Yes, he won. Yet,

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at what cost. Our lives are rarely that triumphant. Some stories turn out horrifically awful. A chance meeting turns into rape, murder, and disappointment. Who cares about that because we have a chance at success? Is that chance worth all the wasted years trying to recover?

We all have a story. We're writing it as we speak. Personally, I don't understand gambling. I think it's about beating the odds. Explain odds? Are odds saying we usually win or usually lose? Social media says we win more than we lose. Do you think Vegas really works that way? They pay out more than they take in? Do you really believe that? I don't understand why we must gamble with one quarter of our lives? Many people only live half of that life. Day after day are stories of people dying and coping with tragedy. Do we really want to be an irony?

Why don't we write our own story? Make a plan to invest in the next twenty-five years. Instead, I feel that most of us are letting an unpredictable life dictate our next minute. We just let life come at us without a plan. Yes, there is the unexpected. There could be a chance meeting or lucky encounter. They are great stories when they happen. We just went through four real stories. Stories that bleed wasted time. What type of story are you allowing to dictate your life?

I don't want to be a downer. I don't know the percentage of success and failure in life. What I do know is that life loves curve balls. They are part of life. Should we ask for curve balls? I'm not demanding that you toss an uninspired marriage. Make it an inspired marriage. Start right now! Make your life an inspired life. Start right now! What I don't want you to say is "I will spend one quarter of my life trying to change him or her?" If they have been rotten then it's likely they are rotten. What do you do with rotten apples? Toss them away. Don't eat the rotten. It's will just make you sick and tired of being sick and tired.

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Gamble on your life. Make it a winner. Place the sure bet. The stories we write are lessons. Yet, they also could be an inspiration. I know so many people who have live uninspired lives. So many! I did for such a long time. I can't tell you how lucky I was when she told me to go. I wanted to stay in that hell pit. Yet, months later (in the mirror) I found myself for the first time. Then it hit me! All the wasted time. All the wasted fears and tears. I could have been so much more. Then I had to pick myself up and take another ten years to re-invent myself. To make a good life. I believe I wasted twenty-five years trying to live something that I was not. Just don't do it! Start writing a better story now. Your time on earth is shrinking, do you know that?