

Listening To My Life

By Sharon Swing

Experience turns belief into faith.

There is a difference between *believing* something to be true and *knowing* it to be true. I can *believe* the Bible, because it is the word of God. I *know* certain passages are true, because my life experiences have afforded me the opportunity to experience them to the depths of my being. My life story offers me solid experience on which to base my *faith* in God for the present and for the future. Listening to my life is a key source for my spiritual growth as I continue to learn who God is, and who I have been made to become.

But what if my life story goes unexamined? Am I missing out on opportunities to integrate God's words, his truth, and his promises into life today and all my tomorrows? Is it possible to have a head-full of knowledge about God and still be blinded to his work in my life?

Unfortunately, yes. I confess I lose the handle on my own story at times. These periods of time are when I'm feeling disconnected from God, from myself and from others. I get self-absorbed, instead of God-absorbed. I don't receive and give love as freely. Worship and Bible reading becomes a duty and a ritual instead of a practice full of anticipation that the God of the universe wants to meet with me. I go through days without feeling like I am experiencing 'LIFE to the full' that Jesus talks about. (John 10:10) My friend calls that living LIFE with a capital 'L.'

I don't want to merely believe that Jesus came to give me 'LIFE to the full,' I want to experience it and have faith in the truth of that scripture. When I follow the plot (God loving me into his likeness) and many supporting subplots of my life, I live LIFE with that capital 'L.'

Philippians 3:16 NIV says, "Only let us live up to what I have already attained." These words pack a sense that I need to wake up to what is already there. I have to remember my story and be keenly aware of what I have 'already attained' through Christ. Let's start with each breath I take being attained through the maker of the universe. I have attained my unique identity as a beloved, beautiful child of the Most High God; unconditional acceptance; power to overcome darkness, eternal security; and on and on. Really, is there anything that I have attained that is not from his hand? This challenges me to ask the question, "Will I make choices today that turn me toward God and what I have already attained in him, or will I turn away?" My past informs my present, and reminds me that trusting God and his ways is what brings me Life.

I have faith in the reality that the Holy Spirit intercedes with groaning deeper than words when my tears ran dry from sorrow from a broken relationship.

I have faith-filled confidence that God turns 'mourning into dancing' because God blessed my husband and me with a child against all odds. (Psalm 30:11)

My life would be impoverished if I did not notice the reality of God walking through the valley of the shadow of death with me as I heard him say, 'healing will come' as I awaited news on the status of my husband's cancer. (Psalm 24)

Faith prompts me to anxiously await the sensation of the Holy Spirit's presence creating holy ground when gathered in soul-bearing community. Jesus' promise of "where two or three are gathered, I will be there," is a fact to me, because I have taken account of these experiences in my life. (Matthew 18:20)

I have suffered the embarrassing consequences of not heeding the wisdom contained in Proverbs. Like this one, for example: "Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue." (Proverbs 17:28)

As I read the account of the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years, I can see myself following their cycles of turning away from God, and God's faithfulness in helping them choose to turn back toward him. (Exodus)

When I look back on my story and see what has given me life and what has drained life from me, I gain clues to understand that I was uniquely and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139) I was made for a purpose, (Jeremiah 29:11) and God intends to live through me, as he has made me to be. I can worship authentically when I sing songs like, "Great is Thy Faithfulness," as I take account of just a few of the many blessings that have come from his hand.

My capacity to trust and believe God for those parts of scripture I have not personally experienced is stretched when I know how my own story connects with scripture. My journey toward God is wrapped up in my story, and it is inseparable from it. In *The Gift of Being Yourself*, David Benner writes, “Christian Spirituality involves a transformation of the self that occurs *only* when God and self are both deeply known. Both, therefore, have an important place in Christian spirituality.” (*emphasis mine*)

God is inviting me to examine my story for evidence of his presence and activity every day. If I pay attention, I may just notice I am living a life that is full to overflowing – even in the valleys. It is all because of who he is, and his intention to love me into a life that allows him to prove himself true to his Word.

Every morning, God asks each of us the same question, “Will you trust me?” I can say ‘yes,’ without hesitation when I remember his activity in my story, and that it just a small part of his grand epic recorded in scripture, in your story, and throughout history. He keeps proving himself to be trustworthy.

This is my prayer:

Father God,
Please continue to cause my belief be turned to faith as I experience the reality of your activity in my life. Grant me the desire and ability to notice how you are actively proving your Word to be true in the story of my life. Grow my faith and trust in you as my story unfolds. Let it be so.