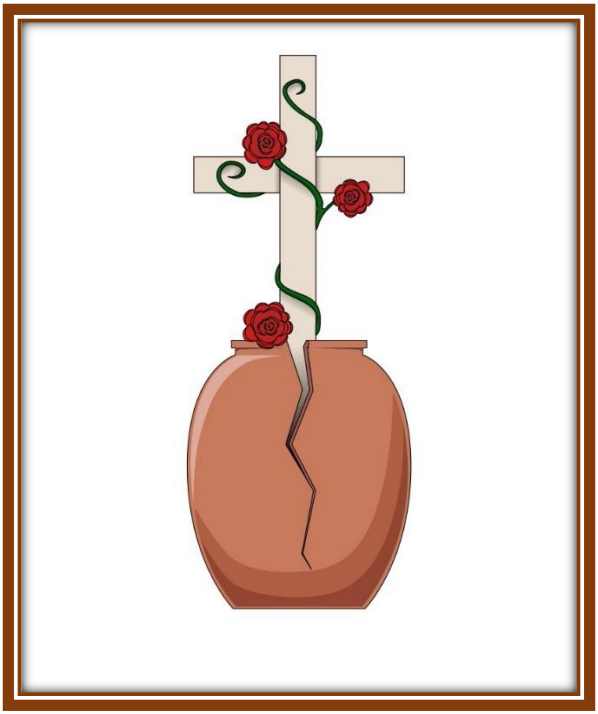

GOD'S STORY IN OUR LIVES

✝

Women Victorious

Copyright © 2020 Women Victorious
Authors: Sandra Julian Barker, Joan C. Benson,
and Marjorie Wingert
All Rights Reserved

Any unauthorized reprint or use of this material is prohibited
without express written permission from the author
and/or publisher.

Unless otherwise marked, Scripture quotations are from the NIV --the New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked New King James Version Bible, unless otherwise noted. Scripture taken from the New King James Version® - Copyright © 1970, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright© 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Published by Joyful Writer Press
www.joyfulwriterpress.com
ISBN 9798697809143

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Connecting Through Story

Chapter One: Jars of Clay

Chapter Two: Why My Story is Important

Chapter Three: Lessons Learned about Our Stories

Chapter Four: Beauty from Ashes

Chapter Five: Is My Story Even Worth Telling?

Chapter Six: The Story of a Warrior Princess

Chapter Seven: His Glory and Majesty…and Me?

Chapter Eight: How Do I Tell My Story

Chapter Nine: Practical Tips

Chapter Ten: Helpful Hints

Chapter Eleven: Women Victorious Mission

Women Victorious Bios & End Notes

“Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees
which give way, say to those with
fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear…
Your God will come and save you’“
Isaiah 35:3-4

At every stage and season of our lives,
may we proclaim with David:
‘Then my tongue shall tell of Your righteousness
and of Your praise all the day long’”
Psalm 35:28 ESV

INTRODUCTION

Connecting Through Story

When Jesus came to show us what God was like, he came telling stories. Since we were children, we've been drawn to stories — we love to hear them and we love to tell them.

Author Scott Russell Sanders wrote: "I choose to write about my experience not because it is mine, but because it seems to me a door through which others might pass. Our stories form a door that others see propped open. They peer in and gasp, 'You, too? I thought I was the only one!'"

As you listen to our stories, it's our hope that you will see the similarities in our paths and your path – and that you'll recognize that we are all in this together. We hope our stories will help encourage you to rely on the grace of God to get you through the tough battles and pull you from the deep pits. That you will feel His love in your life in beautiful ways.

Psalm 90:9 says, "…we spend our years as a tale that is told." Let's do our best to tell a tale that is worth hearing.

Why is My Story Important?

Your story is important, because you are important to God. He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love," Jeremiah 31:3.

Think of yourself in the words of the Psalmist who says, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works." He goes on to speak of the days of his life, saying, "In your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them," Psalm 139:14 & 16. God had a plan and a purpose when He created beautiful You!

What is My Story?

Every morning when your feet hit the floor, a new chapter of your story begins. If yesterday's chapter seemed like a wash-out, pull out a clean sheet of paper and start fresh with a new day. There's an old hymn about God's faithfulness that says, "Morning by morning, new mercies I see…"

Your story is comprised of laughter and tears, boring days and happy days, sunshine, shadow and rain; doing for others and having others do for you. All of these components (and more) come together to create a life worth living and a story worth telling. Your story is unique and yet, strangely familiar.

This book is written to help you, dear reader, to see your life as a story to be told. We've included inspirational pieces, encouraging quotes, and God's own words to you. Finally ending with practical ways to help you tell your story.

Grab a journal, notebook, or ipad and use the questions in this book as a jumping off point to start writing.

Your life is God's story of love in human flesh. Share that story and God's love with those around you.

Join us as we all share God's story in our lives. To God be the glory, great things He has done!

--by Sandra Julian Barker

"Since we were children, we've gravitated to stories —
we love to hear them and tell them. The best stories
aroused connection, conviction, and compassion
in us as we listened. They taught us
and inspired us. They served as cautionary tales
or models of faith to emulate."

-- by Ann Kroeker, from byFaith magazine

CHAPTER ONE

Jars of Clay

Connecting, empowering, equipping…
telling God's story in our lives
We are Ordinary Women…
with an Extraordinary God

The picture on the cover of this book features a piece of pottery with a barely discernable crack along its base. The inside page shows us a pot with a large crack down the front. Do you ever feel like your life has a barely discernable crack along its base, or perhaps a much larger crack down the center? Are there things you've done in your life, or circumstances that have come your way that make you feel flawed in some way? Has a piece of your heart or your dreams or your life seemed to crack and break apart?

It helps to remember -- no matter how broken we may be, God is always there holding us together with cords of love.

Years ago, Christian author and speaker Patsy Clairmont, wrote a book entitled, "God Uses Cracked Pots." Whew! Aren't we glad about that! Being cracked or having a flaw or two (or a dozen!) doesn't make us worthless, rather it gives us a story to tell and it gives God an opportunity to show others that "His grace is sufficient." Instead of making us less useful, it actually makes us more useful.

> "But we have this treasure in jars of clay
> to show that this all-surpassing power
> is from God and not from us"
> 2 Corinthians 4:7

Back when God created the first man, the Bible tells us in Genesis 2:7, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of

the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

So, basically you and I are created from the dust of the earth. That's what God means when He says that "we have this treasure in jars of clay." And so, it would appear that this jar of clay and the human body are made from some of the same materials.

A jar of clay is a sturdy container, yet it can also be cracked and broken – much like our bodies.

So, what is the treasure held in our fragile jars of clay? The Treasure referred to in the verse is the Holy Spirit. If you are a child of God, the Holy Spirit dwells within you. He dwells within an ordinary jar of clay – the human heart within the human body.

It's amazing and wonderful and every kind of superlative you can think of that the Almighty God of all creation would deign to dwell within little ole you and me. That a Treasure beyond price chooses to reside in this ordinary cracked pot is both beautiful and extraordinary.

That power working within us is an "all-surpassing power." God could have chosen to create us all to be Wonder Women and Supermen with angelic capabilities, but He didn't.

Instead, He created us with free will. We are simple jars of clay who often become flawed and cracked, so that when He uses us to do something great, we will know the power for that great feat did not come from ourselves, but rather came from the all-surpassing power of God working through us.

God, in His great wisdom, chooses to use human beings to accomplish His great work on this earth. We human beings are frail jars of clay, easily broken, yet strong in the Hands of the Master Potter who well-knows how to use that which He has created. "For when I am weak, then I am strong," 2 Corinthians 12:10.

How wonderful to know the power that created our world and every universe in the great beyond is the same power that resides within ordinary me and you.

We have a story to tell - and it's a good story of God's all-surpassing power working in our cracked jars of clay. It's exciting and should fill us with joy and gratitude that we can be part of His great plan for our little corner of the world.

BROKEN...

Our beautiful life together was shattered.
Broken pieces lay around me like silent
reminders of what had been.
Slivers of love and security lay in
one corner, while bits of companionship
and mirth were fallen to the side.
So much of value -- irretrievably lost.
I stared at the mess, daunted by
the dreadful destruction of my life.
Dare I pick up the pieces? Dare I attempt
putting them back together again?
Broken fragments glittered in the sunlight,
as if mocking my loss.
Could the glue of perseverance and hope
hold fragile pieces together?
Was it possible for life to continue as it had before?

...**AND MENDED**

Hope glimmered along the edges of my mind.
Maybe, just maybe, bits of broken fragments
could be pieced together again.
They might even form some semblance of a whole.
Not as they had been before. No.
But still, something good and useful.
I measured the damage, checked out the ruin,
and pulled out my glue gun.
A dash of faith here, a dollop of good-cheer there,
a bit of fortitude spread all around and voila!
A new existence has been created.
Endurance triumphs over emptiness, and
a whole blossoms from broken pieces.
Cracks still remain and sometimes glue
pulls apart at the edges. Nonetheless,
victory has been won and, even now -- life is good.

--by Sandra Julian Barker

~~Sharing Your Story

» What do you consider a crack or flaw in yourself?

» Have you ever been broken? Are you broken now? Describe:

» How do you feel about God's Spirit indwelling you?

"Everyone has a story"

--from PBS American Portrait

CHAPTER TWO

Why My story is Important

Our individual stories are some of the most powerful tools for evangelism and discipleship. You are the expert. Your personal stories speak specifically to what has happened to you. Your story is unique. It is one of a kind and therefore carries its own message of hope and encouragement.

> "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect," 1 Peter 3:15

God tells us to share our story. 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to be prepared to give an answer for the hope of Christ within us. Telling your story not only prepares us to give such an answer, but it also helps us communicate Christ's hope within our lives.

Story telling is a universal tool which connects people from diverse backgrounds together. Everybody loves to hear a good story. It's a way to draw people in, particularly those whom you may not ordinarily be able to reach.

Purposes of Story

It helps keep our love of Christ alive. The more we remember our stories, the more we fuel our love for Jesus. It reminds us of our need for Christ and His undeserved mercy and grace.

Our stories encourage others. When we reflect on what God has done for us, we see God's faithfulness. These recollections during challenging times, encourages us to persevere. Revealing God's faithfulness in our personal lives

inspires hope within those actively struggling through trials. We are reminded that we are not alone. We are reminded that God is with us.

Your story may provide a valuable resource of wisdom, hope, and encouragement. There may be those listening who have just entered a similar storm to the one through which you have already walked. The wisdom and experience you've gleaned from riding beyond the breakers may be an invaluable help to others.

A temptation often exists to appear perfect. However, sharing our past struggles, mistakes, and hardships creates the opportunity for more intimate and genuine relationships.

In Isaiah 61:3 we read how beauty is made from the ashes of our lives, and in Psalm 30:11 how mourning is turned to dancing. When we testify to these truths, it brings honor and glory to God. It points directly to God as Defender, Savior, Redeemer, and Friend.

God – the Great Author

When we testify of God's transforming power in our lives, it places the focus off ourselves and squarely back onto God. Jesus becomes the center, and God is showcased. Telling our story bears witness to how God can do all things, work through all things, and triumph over all things.

--by Marjorie Wingert

~~Sharing Your Story:

» Do you enjoy reading or listening to people's stories? What's your favorite story?

» What is the greatest need for Jesus in your life right now? How about in the past?

» What is your greatest fear? What is your greatest hope?

» Where do you see yourself in your life journey?

"To see that your life is a story while
you're in the middle of living it
may be a help to living it well."

--by Ursala K LeGuin, "Gifts"

"The true story of every person in this world
is not the story you see, the external story.
The true story of each person is the
journey of his or her heart."

*-- by John Eldredge and Brent Curtis,
"The Sacred Romance -- Drawing
Closer to the Heart of God"*

CHAPTER THREE

Lessons Learned About Our Stories

As I look back on my long life, I see many chapters overflowing with endless, but often vivid scenes. What I imagined my life to be when I was young only faintly resembles the reality of my story as I have lived it. What happened to my expected dreams? Even with fierce determination to stay the course of faith with God's wind in our sails, life can surprise us in ways we never thought.

Most people don't sit around dwelling on potential obstacles on the path to their desired "best life." My story evolved, maybe like yours did, impacted by the precious ones God gave me to love, by influences from culture, and by jobs attained or lost. Dreams can be shaken by betrayal, illness, deaths, financial losses, and so on.

Sometimes we are the problem. We might even yield ourselves to temptation, giving rise to sin in our thoughts and actions, or deny God's power by dwelling in fear. God tells us in His Word, we will have troubles here on Earth. So why are we surprised when trials come?

Wisdom Gained

Thankfully, I have gained some wisdom over the years. I've learned that when I place my story, my life, into the loving hands of Father God, no matter what surprises take place, He will use the disappointments and sorrows to further reveal His faithful love. He will heal our hearts, and use every scrap of our shattered desires to our ultimate blessing. He will draw us ever closer to His heart in preparation for the day we will meet face to face. He's "got this," as young people say today.

It's up to us to yield our story to the One who made us. He will create beauty for ashes, and pour the oil of joy for mourning; He will give us a garment of praise to replace a spirit of despair. Then, we will be a planting of the Lord for a display of his splendor (paraphrased from Isaiah 61:3).

My story matters. Your story matters. Give your priceless life story to the Lord. *--by Joan C. Benson*

~~Sharing Your Story:

» What are your dreams – past and present?

» Do you feel you are on course for dream fulfillment, or have some or all of your dreams been crushed (which ones?)?

» What troubles and/or circumstances have seemed to spoil your dreams?

» How would you describe the term, "God's got this!" in your life?

"God is writing individual love stories with each of us"

---by podcaster Sherrie Pilkington

CHAPTER FOUR

Beauty from Ashes

In the book of Isaiah, God makes a fascinating promise. He says He will give His hurting children, ”beauty for ashes.” This means He will turn something that seems bad into something good.

In Greek mythology, there’s a bird called the Phoenix. At some point in its life, the bird bursts into flames. The Phoenix then rises from the ashes of its flaming death and is reborn more beautiful than before.

While the story of the Phoenix is only a myth, the work God does in the lives of His children is very real. By the power of God, you can rise from the ashes of your burning sorrow. You can become stronger and more beautiful than ever before, and, yes, you can once again be filled with joy.

Do you think the Phoenix had a story to tell to her other bird friends after her miraculous transformation? Can you imagine her describing the fear and pain she felt as she endured the horrible flames? And then when she rose from the smoking ashes with singed feathers and burning feet – how might she explain her deadly experience?

When her friends saw how she overcame such a fiery death and rose from the hot ashes more beautiful than before, do you think they listened more closely to what she had to say? Do you think her story might have made an impact in their own lives?

> "To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified," Isaiah 61:3 NKJV

When beauty rises from ashes and joy replaces mourning, people notice. They'll see a difference in your life and they'll listen more intently to your story.

Like never before, you'll be in a position to be called a "tree of righteousness," and your story will bring glory to Almighty God in ways you never imagined.

We were placed on this earth to have a right relationship with God and to bring glory to His name. Let's rise from our ashes and proclaim our beautiful story to a watching world. *--by Sandra Julian Barker*

~~Sharing Your Story:

» List things in your life you consider to be ashes (failures, losses, heartaches, hardships, etc):

» Can you think of good things that have come into your life from, or as a result of those ashes?

» In what way does your story bring glory to God?

"But God can make the impossible, possible. This theme has been present from the start of my life and has carried throughout the whole of it…God's plan for my life has never faltered. Each loss, each hardship, and trial has been transformed to beauty from ashes. In my very weakness, He has made me strong"

- --by *Marjorie Wingert*

CHAPTER FIVE

Is My Story Even Worth Telling?

My heart struggled with inadequacy. How ineffective I feel in this work of telling stories. Doubts assail. Accusations beat me raw.

You are wasting your time, it began. *Look at you, what have you accomplished?*

I slumped on my loveseat. My mind felt weighed down and my heart discouraged. *What am I doing? Do you really think God can use you? You're never going to make a difference. Give it up*. Disheartened, I ceased writing. Discouragement filtered through my veins.

I'll check email, I thought*, at least I can do that*. My fingers flew over the keys. What met me on the screen became balm to my soul.

There, an email waited for me, timely in its receipt. The words from a dear friend lifted my spirit. Earlier, I had jotted quick notes of encouragement to my friend. The tidings I typed had not been creatively spun or fluently written. Yet, the words were heartfelt despite their ungrammatical nature.

Here, as I listened to the computer, an epiphany materialized. I realized what mattered most was not the perfectly crafted sentence structure or vivid use of imagery, but the heart contained within the pages. For it was not my sterling use of the English language which touched my fellow sojourner but the affirmation and love which spoke through my words.

An Encouraging Word

Another brilliant flash illuminated my mind. Where I fall short with using social media for communicating God's message, I had failed to recognize the everyday power that an encouraging word, a loving gesture, or a kind act can impact lives for Christ. Even using soft tones to diffuse a simmering situation rather than an angry response, can be just as powerful as an inspired speech over the airwaves. God uses the everyday, the simple things, that are girded beneath by love, kindness, gentleness, patience, goodness, faith, and joy to touch hearts.

I realized in this moment that sometimes I can be so blinded to the little things. These minor details frequently are what matter most. Often times, we raise ourselves to lofty expectations when we need reminding that what is most important are the people in front of us, the lives which we touch everyday, and the very chores which we lovingly labor to complete for our family. We can forget to focus on the ones who are right there in front of us. Whether these are the people we pass at church or sit beside in the pews, the co-workers we rub shoulders with at work, or the very family members housed within our own walls, we need to be reminded that our ministry first and foremost begins with those with whom we live.

Our calling is first and foremost God, our spouses, and our children rather than the world at large. Changing our baby's diapers is as powerful a ministry to our little loved one as proclaiming the Word of God over a simulcast. Wiping noses, packing lunches, and folding laundry holds as much power to touch and change lives as witnessing on the international stage. We need to be reminded that our homes, our family's lives, and those with whom we rub shoulders are our own personal mission field and calling.

So many times, I think we romanticize our calling overlooking what is right in front of our noses. Please do not misunderstand me. Yes, God has also called some of us to different mission fields outside of our homes. But, for many of us, our primary mission field is our homes and we need not discount the great work and impact we have in our family's lives. Sometimes we also believe we need to use big means and grand measures to reach the world for Christ. Yet, like me today, remember that sometimes our words of encouragement, acts of love, and kindness speak more powerfully than the most expensive marketing measures.

God's Story

Telling God's story does not need to be complicated. We just need to begin looking to our homes, our families, friends, and spheres of influence where we can impact lives for Christ through loving connections. We also need to be reminded that our words need not be grand or illustrious to impact lives. Instead, our words need to be real, honest, heartfelt, and true. After all, it is not our words that change the hearts of men but the Holy Spirit, Himself.

Satan likes to paralyze us into inaction. That serpent of old likes to deceive us into thinking we cannot measure up. Or, he tries to overwhelm us that we might be blinded to the small steps we can take. To be used by God, we do not need to be superheroes, renowned authors, or famous speakers. We just need to be faithful to God. Why? Because it is Jesus Christ who is the 'rock star' and not us. For it is the power through the Holy

Spirit and not power in our own strength which God uses to lead men and women, boys and girls to salvation. Likewise, it is God's work in us which begins to tell our story…His story through us. All we need to do is be faithful. Are you being faithful? *--by Marjorie Wingert*

~~Sharing Your Story

» Do you ever feel like your story is not worth telling? Why?

» In what ways could your story make a difference to someone else?

» What would give you the confidence to share your story?

"There is no greater agony than bearing
an untold story inside you."
--by Maya Angelou, poet

CHAPTER SIX

The Story of a Warrior Princess

As Christian women, we can be "*Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might,*" Ephesians 6:10.

The photo shows beautiful marble statues that adorn The Victor Emmanuel II National Monument in Rome, Italy. The figures represent warrior princesses of the Lord God, fighting in the battle of good versus evil. Their shields even bear the sign of the cross of Christ.

As Christian women, we are jars of clay, filled with the amazing treasure of the Holy Spirit. It's His all-surpassing power that gives us the ability and strength to become warrior princesses in His service.

Deborah, Warrior Judge of Israel

The Bible tells the story of a warrior princess in God's army. Back in 1230 B.C., a woman named Deborah was chosen to be one of the twelve judges of Israel. When it was time for Israel to go to battle against a far superior enemy force, Deborah told Barak, commander of the Israelite army, that God had spoken to her, and He was going to give them victory.

Barak, however, said that he would not go into battle if Deborah did not go with him. And so, Deborah became a warrior and led the Israelite army against the Canaanite enemy and Sisera their commander. She called out to the troops: "*Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you*?" Judges 4:14.

The Israelites won the war in the power of the Lord. Then, Deborah sang a song in Judges 5, saying, "*I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel…They fought from the heavens; the stars from their courses fought against Sisera…Thus let all Your enemies perish, O Lord! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength*."

We read these verses in Judges 4 and 5 and think, *Wow, she did good*! *She must have been one tough lady!* But, was she? I believe Deborah was an ordinary woman, much like you and me. We fail to imagine how she must have felt performing those jobs at a time in history when only men were in such positions.

Deborah was a wife and mother when she was called by the Lord to judge and then to lead the army for the people of God. She could have said, *I'm only a woman – I'm not qualified*! But she didn't shrink from either of those duties. She answered the call of God, and He enabled her to accomplish these difficult, dangerous jobs "*in the power of His might."*

We should be encouraged and inspired by the brave actions of our long-ago sister. We may live in a different time than she did, but the battles we fight in this sinful world are not so different. We still need to be able to judge right from wrong and to discern what it is that God requires of us each day. And,

we still need to put on the armor of God and fight the forces of evil "*in the power of His might*."

Deborah was no Wonder Woman, but she was a warrior princess for God! If you are a child of God, you have the power of the Holy Spirit living within you and you too are a warrior princess of God. God will never ask you to do something that He does not give you the ability to do.

What is Your Story, Warrior Princess?

We are warrior princesses in the Army of the King – and our King is Jesus Christ. That fact should excite us and make us stand just a bit taller as we consider the high calling He offers each of us.

Imagine yourself as the woman who is bravely holding her shield and her sword in front of her. And know that you "*can do all things through Christ who strengthens you*." And not only that, but "*In all these things we are more than Conquerors through Him who loved us,*" Romans 8:37.

Your story may not look quite like Deborah's story, but that's okay, each of our stories is unique, but no less important. Although we are all different, we all have similar needs and challenges in life. What is your story?

Don't forget the old saying, "The pen is mightier than the sword." --*by Sandra Julian Barker*

~~Sharing Your Story

» Has there ever been a time you felt the all-surpassing power of the Holy Spirit work through you? Describe.

» What impresses you most about the story of Deborah?

» Can you imagine yourself as a warrior princess? What does that look like?

"I'll tell you a secret about storytelling.
Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty ...
were not perfect in the beginning.
It's only a happy ending on the last page, right?
If the princess had everything from the beginning,
there wouldn't be a story. Anyone who is
imperfect or incomplete can become the
main character in the story."

--from Shugo Chara, anime character

CHAPTER SEVEN

His Glory and Majesty … and Me?

"Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory in the heavens." Psalm 8:1

Have you ever felt small as you looked into the night skies, stood on a mountaintop, or gazed into what seems like an endless sea from the shoreline? My human life, which is of utmost importance to *me*, is but an infinitesimal dot in one unfathomable universe ... among many universes. In Psalm 8:3, David, the Psalmist, raises this question: *"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"*

Creator of All

The Scriptures proclaim His creativity in Psalm 104: 24: *"How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures."* When I view the intricate details of nature, I am in awe. My heart is stirred at the exquisite pinks, reds, and yellows of a setting sun at times dispersing its glory into clouds and reflecting waters. Upon delighting in the scent of honeysuckle or a delicate rose bloom, I am humbled by God's meticulous design. The calming song of a dove's *cooooo-coooo*, or a lyrical human voice can lift my spirits even in turbulent times. How can I hold a newborn baby, so helpless, yet brimming with potential, and *not* see His works?

I have only to let myself see, feel, hear, and touch what is all around me, and it becomes evident that God has allowed us glimpses of His Glory *now*. I can only imagine what Heaven will be as we then gaze upon the One who is the Creator!

It would take greater faith than I have to believe that my world came into being from some astonishing accident of nuclear particles. Or that the complexity of human life evolved from amoeba emerging from its watery habitat. Even the precision of the Earth's tilt as it rotates, scientists say, is "just about right" (like perfect?) for advanced life to flourish. A "coincidence?"

He Is – and I Am Not

It is no wonder that I am overwhelmed that God, The One who has formed not only my "tiny" yet miraculous life, but the whole of all universes, should care for me.

"But God," I ask. "*How* can you care about *me*?"

I am but one among the myriads. My heart is so selfish. My woes are surely fleeting and unremarkable among the countless multitudes in Your creation.

And You? So Eternal, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient ... all that I am not. My mind is incapable of grasping the wonder of You.

And yet -- I *can* know absolutely that He cares ... for me ... and you. We *do* see the beauty of His handiwork and His

revelation through our senses. But, even greater evidence is that same all-powerful, creative God wants to have a *relationship* with me! And you! If you wonder how I know this, I can be certain because He sent His Son, Jesus, to dwell among us on this planet. He came to teach, to heal, and to make a way for me, and all of us who seek God, to have relationship with his Almighty, Majestic, Perfect Father. Jesus embodies the words of Eternal Life. Jesus, the only Son of God.

--by Joan C. Benson

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. 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 4:9-11.

"You have made them (human beings) a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. ... Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Psalm 8:5,9.

~~Sharing Your Story

» Have you ever felt small when you see some beautiful piece of nature? Describe the situation and how you felt:

» What is your favorite piece of nature?

» Describe your relationship with Almighty God.

THE
NUTS AND BOLTS
OF SHARING
THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE

CHAPTER EIGHT

How Do I tell my story?

For a Biblical Model of how to tell your story, read Acts 26.

Below you will find a short list of suggested writing prompts followed by a more detailed five-point outline which will help you tell your story. You will find questions listed to help prompt or inspire you. Please don't be overwhelmed by all the questions. These are only prompts and suggestions for you to help tie your story together.

Some of the questions below may not connect with you. Others may jump off the page. Don't try to include or address each of the points. Choose the ones which resonate with you and incapsulate the bones of your story.

»»Writing Prompts to Help Tell Your Story

» What does my life revolve around? What motivates me?
» What are my talents and good qualities?
» What are some areas in my life where I need improvement?
» What makes me happy? What makes me sad?
» What is my biggest question (or two) or problem in life?
» What do I want my life to look like?

> "God created each life according to His will. Each life is His story, woven by the Master's Hand, led along the path laid out for each person – even before that life began."
>
> *---from Ordinary Women – Extraordinary God," by Sandra Julian Barker*

»»Five-point Outline

1. Opening:

a. Identify a theme or Bible verse. Use these to frame your story and weave throughout.

b. Speak to issues or common areas of struggle. Briefly touch upon how Christ helped you find a way out.

c. Things to consider:

--What was your life like before Christ?

--What did your life revolve around?

--How did these influence your life?

--How did God use these things to draw you to Him?

2. Life Before Christ:

a. Touch briefly on past areas of struggles which relate to your theme. Do not boast or go into great detail describing the area of sin.

b. Things to consider:

--What was your upbringing and background?

--What was your background in Christ?

--What were areas of unfulfillment?

--What did you value most instead of Christ?

--In whom or what did you place your security and trust?

--What were your emotions and feelings? Particularly, when things did not go as planned?

3. How You Came to Christ

a. Describe how you came to Christ.

b. List any steps you took to know Christ

c. Simply present the gospel. Explain it in such a way that people who do not know Christ or who have not been exposed to God would understand.

d. Things to think about:

--Where were you when you gave your life to Christ?

--What awoke you to your need of Christ?

--What were the events and circumstances which led to your conversion?

--What challenges and needs were you facing in your life before you came to know Christ?

--What had been your motivations before Christ?

--What do you see as your need now? What had you been searching for before Christ?

4. Life After Christ

a. Draw out areas of change within yourself, circumstances, or events which relate back to the theme.

b. Be transparent and honest. Even when we come to know Christ, life is not perfect. We still struggle. Do not be afraid to share this. But be sure to emphasize how Christ has helped and is helping you overcome your struggles.

c. Share what is currently going on in your life. Share the things Christ is doing in and through you now that you know Him. Bring it back to the present.

d. Things to consider:

--What are some of the changes which coming to Christ has made?

--How are you different?

--How has Christ satisfied and met your needs?

--What does having a relationship with Him now mean to you?

--What are areas in which you still struggle and still need to keep bringing before God?

--What is an area of excitement for you now that you know Christ?

--What has He brought back to life in you? What has He restored? --Share your victories and triumphs!

5. Closing

a. Briefly give a summary statement which encapsulates your story and ties it into the theme.

b. Perhaps even end with a Bible verse which sums up your core message.

CHAPTER NINE

Practical Tips for Sharing Your Story

~Do's

» Pray before you write your story. Ask God for wisdom and insight in how to share your story.

» Write your story like you speak. Make it conversational.

» Practice. Why? Even though it's our story, we may get distracted or nervous in the telling of it. We may even forget portions of our story or important details. All these factors can confuse or detract from the core message

» Make it personal. Say "I" or "me" while avoid saying "you." Add humor. There is a reason why laughter is the best medicine. It alleviates stress, piques interest, and binds us together.

"Your story isn't over yet"

--on a truck sporting cancer ribbon decals

~Don'ts

» Don't glorify or boast about past sins. Why? We do not want the focus on us or the gritty details, but rather on the victory of Christ in us.

» Avoid "Christianese" and churchy phrases.

» Avoid the extremes of being overly positive or negative

» Do not name or criticize churches, people, denominations, etc.,

» Do not condemn. Avoid preaching in your story about what people should do.

» Avoid using dates and ages.

» Avoid religious statements like "Jesus will solve all your problems.

» Don't overdramatize or over-exaggerate. Just be honest and let the Holy Spirit use the simple truth of your story.

CHAPTER TEN

Helpful Tips

» Your testimony is often not to convince someone into the Kingdom but simply a tool to open a door for conversation.

» Make it simple. Unclutter your words. Avoid being wordy.

» Use your story to build relationships; realize the power of Christ in Your story.

» Make sure your conversion and new life in Christ receive the most focus and are the main points.

» Don't be overly wordy but include some specific detail as to events or feelings so that the listener can relate and empathize. Details help make stories more tangible

***If you feel led to publicly share your story*:

» *Ask* another Christian to read your story and offer feedback.

» Practice giving your testimony in front of friends to gain experience.

Helpful Verses

» Paul wrote, "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" Philippians 1:12.

» Jesus said, "On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" Matthew 10:18-20.

» Ananias said to Paul, “The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard” Acts 22:14-15.

» David wrote, “Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done” 1 Chronicles 16:8.

» Paul wrote, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” Romans 10:14-15.

» “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony…” Revelations 12:11.

» Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” Matthew 28:19-20.

"A story--a true story -- can heal
as much as medicine can."

--by Eben Alexander, “Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WOMEN VICTORIOUS MISSION

Our Purpose
To encourage, empower, and inspire women to find victory and hope through Jesus Christ during trials and hardships while addressing relevant issues facing today's women from a biblical perspective.

Our Mission
1. To point women, both lost and saved, to a personal relationship with God, hope in Jesus Christ, and a deeper walk with the Lord through the power of God, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and His refining work in our lives.

2. To help women live out the Great Commission through God's commandment to love by empowering and equipping them to go out and share their stories of faith with the world.

Our Objective
To share personal accounts, lessons, and testimonies of God's grace and faithfulness from our own trials and victories through Christ Jesus along with Scripture, prayer, praise and worship to transform, edify, inspire, and deepen women's love for Christ Jesus.

WOMEN VICTORIOUS BIOS

MARJORIE WINGERT: founder of Women Victorious, Marjorie is a wife, mom, speaker, author, and blogger. With a B.A. in Music and Psychology along with her Master's in Counseling, a degenerative eye condition forced her from a successful career. However, God turned beauty from ashes by opening the door to a new season of life and ministry. Marjorie's heart is to encourage and inspire women to a deeper walk with God. She is passionate about equipping moms to train up their children in the Lord. Her desire to reach kids for Jesus inspired the release of a collaborative album which features Bible verses set to fun, catchy tunes, and the publication of her Christian children's book series which is available on Amazon. Marjorie's parenting prayer blog and Bible Meditations can be found at marjoriewingert.com.

SANDRA JULIAN BARKER: Sandra is mother of three married children and grandmother of six beloved grandchildren. She has been active in her church, teaching Sunday School and Bible studies, for many decades. She volunteers at the local regional jail, sharing God's love with female inmates. She began her freelance writing career 25 years ago. Since that time, hundreds of her newspaper and magazine articles, and short stories have been published, as well as a piece in the best-selling *Chicken Soup for the Mother's Soul*. She has written more than a dozen books which are available on Amazon, and include fiction, inspirational non-fiction, and children's books. Her recent book, *Ordinary Women – Extraordinary God, volume two*, includes the story of a tragic loss within her family, and God's beautiful show of grace. Her blog is Sandra-ramblingrose.blogspot.com.

JOAN C. BENSON: Joan is a wife, mother of four adult children, a grandmother of eight, a former educator, and author/speaker. She has been a freelance writer for over thirty years in addition to having served as a reading specialist, teacher mentor, and classroom teacher in her first career. After retiring from her educational life, she pursued her love for writing with freedom to share her spiritual insights. She had her debut historical fiction novel released by Elk Lake Publishing last summer. Previously, she has been published in multiple Christian magazines including LifeWay's "ParentLife," Regent University's "The Christian Leader," Royal Rangers "High Adventure," and others. Several of her devotional writings have been published on CBN.com. Joan also has many years of experience writing children's ministry publications for LifeWay Publishing for use in both Sunday School and home settings. She is a blogger and you can find out more by heading to her website: www.joancbenson.com.

CHRISTINE McCAIN: Christine is a grandmother of many. After decades of hard work, she is now enjoying retirement. Christine loves the Lord. She is a prayer warrior and intercessor.

PAMELA TANNER: Pamela began singing when she was three-years old. She graduated from Hampton University in 1986, majoring in history with a minor in classical and jazz vocals. She spent 20 years living around the world while working in the global telecommunication field. She is founder of Ravensway, a non-profit, faith-based organization that provides meaningful experiences for children and adults with special needs or disabilities through Music Arts.

END NOTES

--Cover: Photo and cover design by Sandra Julian Barker.

--First page drawing of cracked pot logo by Crey Clark.

--Photos of praying hands, child with hands upraised, Yosemite scene, Snow White and baby Snow White, pottery, writing cherub, and warrior princess statue by Sandra Julian Barker.

--Chapter One: Photo of white cracked pot is a public domain photo from Pixabay.

--Chapter Four: Phoenix depicted in a picture book for children (*Bilderbuch-fur Kinder*) of legendary creatures, created by Friedrich Justin Bertuch in January 1806. This work is in the public domain in the United States because it was published (or registered with the U.S. Copyright Office) before January 1, 1925.

--Chapter Six: Quote, "the pen is mightier than the sword," by English playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839, in his historical play *Cardinal Richelieu*.

"Who am I - and how, I wonder,
will this story end?"

by Nicholas Sparks, The Notebook #1

God says, "I have loved you
with an everlasting love..."

--Jeremiah 31:3