

# STORY TIMELINE EXERCISE



*"You can be a masterpiece and a work in progress at the same time."*

This exercise is designed to help you identify and discern the key people, moments and events that have defined your life and shaped you as a person. The goal then is to name them, understand them, and to see how God's story integrates with your story.

The mountain range exercise below was developed by Victor Frankel during his time in prison in Auschwitz. He learned that stepping back and surveying both the

mountains and valleys of our experience gave meaning and hope to the larger story we are a part of. It gives insight and perspective to the suffering and the transcendence we have all been through.

This will also give you an understanding of your life so far and help make sense of many disparate threads. These personal moments, if observed properly will have a different kind of authority in your life as you allow the gospel to heal parts of your story.

## TO BEGIN

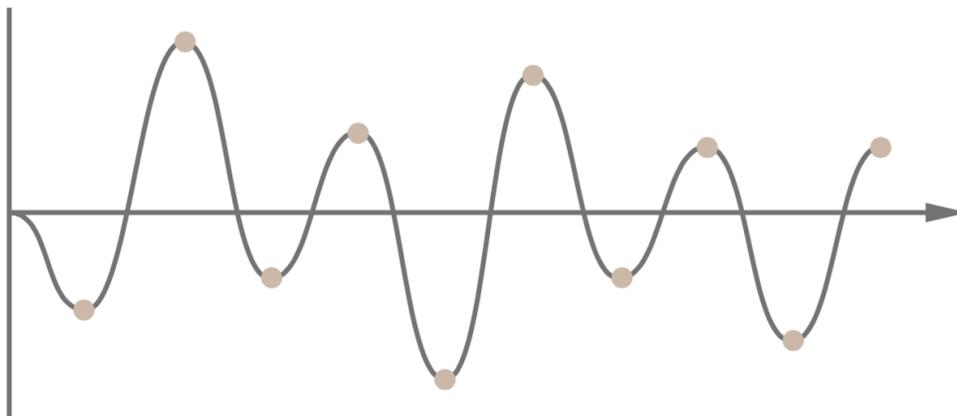
Draw out a line across the page. The central line represents the timeline of your life. This is from the time of your birth until now.

Draw a line alongside that, like a T on its side. At the top write joy. These are the moments that matter to you. These can be joyful or serendipitous events. They can be new relationships or experiences, or major goals or accomplishments, friends or family. You can rate them from 1 - 10, based on the intensity of the event.

The bottom moments represent your deepest pain. These are the hardest and most painful moments you have experienced. These can be losses, disappointments, deaths or betrayals. These represent the valleys in your journey and again can be categorized from 1-10.



When you have completed the mountains and valleys of your life timeline it may look something like this. Start with 10-15 dots (people, moments, events) and then fill in more as you have time.



When you have finished. You should have a strong list of the joy and pain in your life, and key lessons and values. This may not appear that profound

at first but mining your life for wisdom will be one of the best ways to connect your story to God's story.

**Note:** trauma and betrayal are painful realities of being human. This exercise may surface areas in your life where you might only be able to name something painful, and that's it. This is ok.

Each of these dots represents a moment, lesson, or highlight for you to examine. Below are some questions to help you extract meaning and understanding from these events. However, this extraction may take time, and depending on your points of pain, counseling and/or therapy.

- What happened? **NAME IT.**
- What did you feel? **EMBRACE IT.**
- How did you respond? **OWN IT.**
- How did this shape you? **UNDERSTAND IT.**
- What did God teach you, what did you learn? **EXTRACT IT.**
- How can you grow from this or steward for others? **USE IT.**

## **AN EXAMPLE FROM MY STORY (Jon)**

What happened? **NAME IT.** (I moved every two years until I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade)

What did you feel? **EMBRACE IT.** (disoriented and vulnerable as I adjusted to new environments)

How did you respond? **OWN IT.** (Became self-protective and independent, often dismissing my needs and focusing on performing well in school)

How did this shape you? **UNDERSTAND IT.** (became quite adaptable to new environments, weak sense of place, forming stronger friendships has been challenging at times, resisted vulnerability, rarely asked for help when I needed it)

What did God teach you, what did you learn? **EXTRACT IT.** (My needs matter, having roots can be beneficial, vulnerability isn't weakness)

How can you grow from this or steward for others? **USE IT.** (Beware of moments of moving and transition in my life, vocalize needs to others, use experience to help others walk through significant transitions in their life)