



Story Hearts

*embracing the
handwriting of God*

Elisa Pulliam

a devotional study for those waiting on God

StoryHearts

embracing the handwriting of God

by Elisa Pulliam

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For My Children

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introduction

A Work in Progress

Psalm 86:12

*"I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart;
I will glorify your name forever."*

Any time we put words to paper, we risk our hearts and lives for the sake of something greater. For some, it is about working through their personal journey and making sense of series of events that brought them forward to today. For some writers, they are spinning in the trap of producing to sustain their platform and paycheck and increase their stats. Other writers are compelled to craft words as their spiritual act of worship. And others, write on a particular mission to prove a point and convey a message. That's what this short eBook devotional study is all about -- sharing with you a message that will encourage you to wait on God in the silence as you develop of lifestyle of worshipping and trusting God.

This offering is given to you as a part of a larger work in progress -- a work that started in my heart nearly twenty years ago and has undergone some serious sanctification and growing lessons in the last five years. Lord willing, my hope is to share these lessons about the heart, enduring trials, persevering through suffering, waiting on God, and hoping in Him alone in an eBook that is both inspiring and a practical tool for your journey to the cross. But until then, the Word unpacked in this short study is worth giving to you for the sake your journey with the Lord.

Although short, this devotional study is full of Scripture-packed truth on the theology of suffering, illustrating for you how to embrace the handing writing of God in your life. May you find, as you dig deep into the Scriptures, God's faithfulness enabling you to mature in your faith as you learn to trust God more and more each day. And then, I pray, you will eagerly become a story heart testifying of the work of God in your life for the sake of His kingdom purposes. You are part of God's master plan. May this truth give you a portion of hope that will spur you on in the silence.

The Word Speaks

Psalm 40 MSG

¹⁻³ I waited and waited and waited for God.
At last he looked; finally he listened.
He lifted me out of the ditch,
pulled me from deep mud.
He stood me up on a solid rock
to make sure I wouldn't slip.
He taught me how to sing the latest God-song,
a praise-song to our God.
More and more people are seeing this:
they enter the mystery,
abandoning themselves to God.

⁴⁻⁵ Blessed are you who give yourselves over to God,
turn your backs on the world's "sure thing,"
ignore what the world worships;
The world's a huge stockpile
of God-wonders and God-thoughts.
Nothing and no one
comes close to you!
I start talking about you, telling what I know,
and quickly run out of words.
Neither numbers nor words
account for you.

⁶ Doing something for you, bringing something to you—
that's not what you're after.
Being religious, acting pious—
that's not what you're asking for.
You've opened my ears
so I can listen.

⁷⁻⁸ So I answered, "I'm coming."
I read in your letter what you wrote about me,
And I'm coming to the party

you're throwing for me."
That's when God's Word entered my life,
became part of my very being.

⁹⁻¹⁰ I've preached you to the whole congregation,
I've kept back nothing, God—you know that.
I didn't keep the news of your ways
a secret, didn't keep it to myself.
I told it all, how dependable you are, how thorough.
I didn't hold back pieces of love and truth
For myself alone. I told it all,
let the congregation know the whole story.

¹¹⁻¹² Now God, don't hold out on me,
don't hold back your passion.
Your love and truth
are all that keeps me together.
When troubles ganged up on me,
a mob of sins past counting,
I was so swamped by guilt
I couldn't see my way clear.
More guilt in my heart than hair on my head,
so heavy the guilt that my heart gave out.

¹³⁻¹⁵ Soften up, God, and intervene;
hurry and get me some help,
So those who are trying to kidnap my soul
will be embarrassed and lose face,
So anyone who gets a kick out of making me miserable
will be heckled and disgraced,
So those who pray for my ruin
will be booed and jeered without mercy.

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ But all who are hunting for you—
oh, let them sing and be happy.
Let those who know what you're all about
tell the world you're great and not quitting.
And me? I'm a mess. I'm nothing and have nothing:
make something of me.
You can do it; you've got what it takes—
but God, don't put it off.

one

Waiting on God

1 Kings 8:57

*“May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors;
may he never leave us nor forsake us.”*

He knows. He hears.

He listens to our heart cries.

He is aware of our deepest needs.

He is the God who sees and knows and responds.

But often not on our timetable.

Often not to our liking.

Often not how we like to have our needs met.

We live in a fast paced world of instant gratification. We are so accustomed to having our needs met, instantly and conveniently, that patience and perseverance have become lost art forms.

We're hungry so we fix a microwave meal or zip through the drive through to satisfy our hunger pains. We're bored on a Saturday night, so we flip on the TV and instantly download a movie instead of running to the local rental store. Do they even exist anymore? We want new clothes, so we hop on the internet and order online using money we don't have to pay for something we don't need. We're lonely, so we get on Facebook to connect with friends. But are they really our friends or simply pixels pretending to like us?

Our culture has conformed us into impatient people, even from the point of conception. We know our babies gender and names before they are even born, all in the name of convenience. Or is that really another way to disguise our need to be in control? Is the problem that we hate to wait? Or is it that we hate not being in control?

We've not only lost the art of waiting, we've lost the art of trusting God. Waiting requires trust. We don't want to wait, because we don't know how to trust. The good news, however, is that even though we've grown more impatient and controlling over the ages, God has not conformed to our standard. God doesn't work like a drive-through convenience store, handing an overpriced order through a tiny little window. He doesn't let us drive off with a grocery bag full of fixes that won't do justice to our life-size problems.

God knows our trials and challenges, our disappointments and fears. His silence isn't final. Nor it is a sign of rejection. Even though His seemingly lack of response may leave us feeling totally alone, the truth is that it may be His greatest act of love.

The good news is that the Word promises that God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Hebrews 13:8). God is immovable and impenetrable to cultural pressure. Even when God seems silent and removed from our lives, He is ever present. He does not abandon us. God is who He says He is, and according to His Word, He will never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6, Deuteronomy 31:8, Joshua 1:5, 1 Kings 8:57).

Reflection Questions

1. How do you respond to waiting for something, anything?
2. Are you in a season of waiting on God? If so, describe how you're feeling as you wait.
3. What are some of the ways you attempt to fill the silence? Describe your habits, response, feelings.
4. What would be healthy ways to wait on God?

GO deeper

Look up the following Scriptures: Hebrews 13:8, Deuteronomy 31:6, Deuteronomy 31:8, Joshua 1:5, 1 Kings 8:57; 1 Kings 8:57. Turn one or more of these verses into a short prayer and journal your feelings about these Scripture truths.

two

Story Hearts

2 Cor 3:3 MSG

*Your very lives are a letter that anyone can read by just looking at you.
Christ himself wrote it—not with ink, but with God's living Spirit;
not chiseled into stone, but carved into human lives—and we publish it.*

When we find ourselves waiting in silence of God, the challenge before us how to respond. We live in an impatient world, but we need to stop being conformed to thinking of God according to the culture's norms. In other words, we need to learn how to live to glorify God in the waiting, as we build new habits of trusting God with our unanswered prayers. We need to think differently about His silence as an expression of His love, and we can do this through sharing our stories.

Our stories of waiting.

Our stories of encouragement.

Our stories of trials.

Our stories of redemption.

Our stories of blessings.

And our stories of burdens.

Our individual, unique, collective stories, which are a part of the greatest story ever told about a Savior sent to this earth to rescue God's people.

Stories capture the heart of God, reminding us of the way He accomplishes His purposes. The Scriptures are filled with stories of *real* people with *real* needs met by a very *real* God.

“The Bible is most of all a story....There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them. It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of every Story, there is a baby. Every Story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in the puzzle -- the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.” (*The Jesus Storybook Bible*, p. 17)

Although there is only one burning bush, one Abraham and Isaac, one Mary at the well, the character of God comes through clearly and consistently in every single Bible story. Our stories are as significant as the ones found in Scripture, even if they are not published in a leather-bound book and gold foil trimmed pages. The Scriptures explain that our stories are not written on paper nor stone but inscribed on our hearts. And they are meant to be shared with others as a way of teaching about who God is and who we are in Christ.

Even the silence is part of our story. It is like a deep God-breath, pausing at the end of a powerful sentence. His story is not complete. His silence commands our attention, as we lunge forward to learn more about His plan. He'll speak and act when His timing is perfect, and to us that may seem like a thousand years or a single blink.

2 Peter 3:8

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends:

With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

We are living story books filled with the greatest plots and most magnificent narration. Our lives are filled with the best written drama and poignant turn of events, unexpected trials and beautiful celebrations. This is the writing that fills our story hearts and that tell of God's miraculous work.

Our story hearts are not biographies about ourselves. They are testimonies about about a Living, Redeeming Savior actively rescuing His people. We aren't living storybooks, simply meant to be read for pleasure and entertainment. We were story hearts, testifying about the God of the Universe who is interested in the very details of His children's lives.

Reflection Questions

1. Look back on your life over the last 10 - 15 years and jot down a few thoughts that remind you of these kind of stories:

- of waiting
 - encouragement
 - trials
 - redemption
 - blessings
 - burdens
2. Are these stories simply biographical moments or the testimony of God at work?
 3. Can you think of some Scripture verses that capture the life stories you noted above?
 4. What would it look like for you to share one these Scripture-truth stories with a friend this week?

GO deeper

Read through 2 Corinthians 3 in the Message translation (available at www.biblegateway.com) and then in the NIV translation. Work through the passage verse by verse asking the Lord to show you His promises and perspective.

three

Saving Steps

Romans 10:9-10

*That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord,"
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.*

*For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified,
and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

I can speak honestly about God's silence because I've lived through it and learned how to surrender to it. It was a journey in which God revealed His faithfulness wrapped in His love and provisions. It was a time in which I learned to bow my knee and glorify God, in spite of not getting what I demanded or thought I wanted.

One wintery afternoon in January of 2008, I found myself at an unwarranted, unexpected crossroads. Looking back, I probably should never have made the call, but I couldn't take the uncertainty any longer. I phoned my father to simply find out if he was still alive. It had been two months since I had seen my dad and the longest we had gone without speaking. I wanted to know! Did he have a fatal car wreck I never learned of? Did he flee the country? Was he sick? Or was he simply angry with me? I needed to find out, for certain, what caused me to sob as I drove away from a post-Thanksgiving lunch with him. Why did I feel as though I was departing from my father's funeral? In an uncontrollable ugly cry filled with fear, I confessed to my husband, "I don't think I'll ever see my dad again!" My emotions didn't match my reality. All we did was have lunch together.

I knew in my heart it was more than lunch. I knew my dad was mad and hurt, carrying with him resentment from a previous conversation -- one I feared ever broaching. Earlier that fall, in a courageous move of faith, I asked my father for his permission to share my story in church. After nine months of Christian counseling to deal with my anger issues and a nearly-over-taking-me battle with depression, I came to terms with the fact that I was suffering

from post-traumatic stress from the effect of an emotionally and physically abusive childhood. Yes, my loving, dedicated, and wounded parents brought into their marriage a legacy of dysfunction and little resources to bring an end to their pain. It trickled over onto my sister and me, leaving us both grappling with our sense of identity and worth. We grew up as emotionally needy girls desperately seeking love in all the wrong places. For me, I walked a path of destruction -- through elementary school teasing, junior high school foolishness, high school relationships marked by peer pressure, and total rebellion by the time I entered college. With each passing day, I ended up in deeper places of pain, striving to numb out wounds of abuse smattered by sin, shame, and guilt.

God's hand was on my life, however. The Great Rescuer pursued me through Christ-with-skin on friends, accepting me as I was and challenging me to become something entirely new. One friend after another shared His love with me through tangible acts of grace and forgiveness, mercy and hope. It took years before I'd finally receive their gift and step out in faith to accept Christ as my Lord and Savior. It was a matter of coming to terms with my own sin; sin that I thought doomed me to hell in light of my great failures to be a good girl. The promise of salvation through faith, instead of my works, was a fresh wind to my soul. Really? I could simply believe that Christ died on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins and He would make me right and holy before God (Romans 10:9-10). That was it? It seemed too easy, in comparison to the effort I put forth daily to be good enough, not only for God but for everyone else. It was truly God's grace that allowed me to experience the failure of all my own efforts, especially in pursuit of love, leaving me desperate for His alone.

Reflection Questions

1. Who has been Christ-with-skin-on to you in your life?
2. What impact have they made on you and why?
3. What does it look like for you to put your faith in Jesus instead of your own efforts? If you have not given your life to Jesus as Lord and Savior, please consider doing so right now.

Heavenly Father, thank you for pursuing me with the Truth. Yes, I now believe that your Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins, paying the price for all my wrong-doing and enabling me to right with you. I understand that Jesus is with you in eternity, while His Holy Spirit will dwell in me and guide me in all truth, and I want to join you in Heaven when my time comes. Thank you, Father, for making me your child and preparing for my future while providing for my present. Help me to trust in you more and more each day. In Jesus' Name, Amen!

Welcome to the family of God! Please take a moment to share this sweet truth with a Christian friend or with the ministry team of More to Be by email at more@moretobe.com. We will celebrate with you!

GO *deeper*

Read through the following Scripture passages: Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 10:9; Matthew 10:32-33; I John 1:9; Acts 3:1; Acts 2:38; Romans 1:16-17, 2:4-5, 4:16, 5:1, 6:1-8, 8:5-11, 10:9-13, 12:-12. Spend time thinking about what these verses mean to you personal and how you would explain them to someone else.

four

A Story Excavation

Ezekiel 36:26

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”*

While I came to the cross in search of a Living Savior nearly twenty years ago, my father never did receive my faith nor accept its effect on my life. Even seeing a legacy of abuse come to a final end, as evidenced in raising my own small children, was not enough to prove to my dad the power of God at work. Honestly, that was the testimony I wanted to share in church -- a testimony giving God all the glory for transforming not only my life on the outside but not stopping until He got a hold of my inside -- my hardened heart. Even though I was living as an honest believer, going to church, reading my Bible, changing my outward behavior, my heart was stone cold (Ezekiel 36:26). And what was spewing out of my mouth toward my family made my hardened heart perfectly known (Mat 12:34, Luke 6:45).

Matthew 12:34

“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”

God wanted more than my outer life. He was after my heart and everything stored up inside of it. The wounds were roadblocks, preventing His hand from writing the story He meant for my life. God longed to remove the anger and depression through showing me how to forgive and receive forgiveness, but I had to be willing to acknowledge and let go of each painful memory and guilt-stricken moment stored up in my heart. It was simply too heavy a load to carry around every day, and was the primary source of my bitterness and harsh tongue.

With the help of a Christian counselor, I sought God for His truth as she helped me release the pain. I found words for my story and healthy ways to grieve events that transpired 10, 15, and 20 years earlier. It was a miraculous experience as each memory became reality again but then left the burden of my heart as I placed it in my Saviors to carry and walked forward with a new Scripture truth about my identity and the character of God. The Lord showed me how to lay it at all the cross as I learned to trust Him to deal with my offenders justly and

received His forgiveness for the many acts of sin I committed. His fairness became the soothing balm on my angry soul. With each unloaded wound, the bitterness left, the anger subsided, the tears ran dry. What a relief! My spiritual journey finally turned a maturing corner as I moved into a place of honesty. The heart on my sleeve no longer oozed my wounded guts but boldly declared God's healing power as I became a testimony of His grace.

Until.

Until the day of that awful fight with my dad. At the crux of it, my father did not want me to share my story because it was his story, too. That's why I asked permission instead of simply pressing on with the opportunity to speak in church. I knew he was not proud of his fatherhood, and to be honest, I understood. He lashed out at me, from the place of his own pain. Although I knew he wasn't speaking truth, his words inflicted deep wounds. He insisted I deny my faith. I wouldn't. My obedience to the Lord ushered in silence.

Over the next four years, we had little contact. I'd send a note for a holiday, with no response from him. He'd send an email or leave a message saying he'd like to talk, but would never follow up. I lived as though my father was dead, even though I knew he was alive. I spent months crying out to God to restore our relationship. I spent hours in bitterness hating my father. And I found ways to numb out with busyness and projects, ministry and pursuits. But nothing ever dulled the pain.

Reflection Questions

1. Is your heart hardened by pain, shame, bitterness, unforgiveness?
2. What would need to happen for God to get your attention and get a hold of your heart?
3. Are you in a position where you need to seek the forgiveness of God? Of others?
4. Do you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to a place of forgiving those who have hurt you?
5. The Word is used by God as a healing ointment to our souls. How much time are you spending in the Word each day? What would it take for you to get serious about studying and memorizing Scripture? Consider taking advantage of the [Immersed Challenge](http://www.moreto.com) at www.moreto.com.

GO deeper

Read up Psalm 51 in the Message and NIV. What does this passage speak to you about your heart? How can you turn David's words in your own prayer? Go to www.biblegateway.com and look up "heart." What verses stand out to you and why? How does this give you a bigger perspective about what God thinks about our hearts?

five

*The Theology of Suffering: Hypomene**Hebrews 12:1**Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*

I found myself at a crossroads. How was I going to live with this broken relationship? Would it define me? Would it hinder me? Would it control me?

The answer was no. But as I had done with my past, I needed to walk through the process of forgiveness for the present pain caused by my dad. The daily effort was not enough. So I set apart time to be alone with the Lord for a weekend -- away from family, needs, phone, and TV. I spent this time in prayer, worship, and in the Word. I read through the book of Isaiah, pouring out my heart as a fatherless child who God promised to care for and I found myself at the foot of the cross on behalf of my parents. The Lord enabled me to see that my anger could never do enough damage toward my parents to reconcile my pain, and yet His wrath could do more than I ever hoped for. I begged God for mercy on my parents as I released them into His care and began the healing process of forgiveness.

But it took another six months before I could acknowledge the creeping and haunting despair in my heart. I still wanted my daddy back in my life. I was still seeking God for restoration, and there was no hope in sight. In hindsight, I can see that I was seeking an outcome, not God. My hope was in my circumstances. Not Him. God's silence was deafening and discouraging. So I finally stopped praying. I stopped hoping for a new beginning.

Until I was I found myself faced with the theology of suffering. During a week-long summer vacation at a Christian conference center, the daily chapel speaker, James MacDonald, brought forth a powerful message on perseverance, suffering, and responding to trials. repeating the same truth-packed statement:

“Either you’re in the midst of trial, coming out of trial, or heading into to one.”

Ironically, I wondered, “God how does this apply to me? I don’t feel like I’m in a trial.”

The Pastor carefully unpacked the Word, focusing on the Greek work, *Hypomone*, for the word “perseverance” commonly used in the Scriptures in the context for how to respond during a trial -- whether because of your own sin, another’s sin, or living in a fallen world. *Hypomone* means to “remain under; a bearing up under, patience, endurance as to things or circumstances. [It] is often associated with hope and refers to that quality of character that does not allow one to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial...[instead one responds with] patience as a quality of mind, the bearing of evils and suffering with a tranquil mind.” (*Hebrew Greek Study Bible, New Testament Lexical Aids, p. 1683*).

Romans 5:3-4

*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings,
because we know that suffering produces perseverance;
perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

To *Hypomone* is to hope in the Lord’s sovereign will with eyes set fast on Him instead of focusing on the circumstances and crumbling under the pressure. The pastor described it like this:

When the pressure of a trial is upon you, get on your knees. Instead of wrestling out from under the trial, surrender to what God would accomplish in you through it. Persevere through it. The pressure will release as you seek for God’s glory to be revealed through your pain rather than focusing on the release of your pain.

Don’t ask the question, “God why me?” But rather ask, “God, how can I glorify you in this?”

Did all this teaching about suffering apply to the situation with my dad? It was hard to process, as I thought of a trial as a major life crisis, like cancer, divorce, the loss of a child, the loss of a job. There was no place in my mind to conceive of the rejection of my father in the same way. I think because we, as Christians, try to downplay our pain and hide our wounds. We don’t share about the ugly parts in our lives, because that’s “too private.” We don’t admit our anger with God, because what might someone think of our faith. Preachers don’t face the truth about suffering in every shade and color of life, because it might make someone uncomfortable. Until hearing this message, I never had thought of a Biblical response to pain, even though I had spent years healing from deep wounds. I knew what to do after the suffering ended, but not in the midst of it!

By mid week, I had enough of this message and just at the point I was about to shut down, God shut me down. The Holy Spirit yanked on my soul and I crumbled. I found myself publicly trapped in the ugly cry without a single tissue and only short sleeves. It was a true mess forcing me to my knees to hide my face as the worship music played on while everyone else departed. I slipped out a back door and headed straight to the beach, sheltered by the setting sun. At the far corner of the resort, I dropped to my knees. I was out of strength. I lost my fighting spirit, keeping me strong and putting on the happy girl face in the midst of my hidden misery. The Lord was there. He saw me. He met me on the beach and I cried out to him.

“God, what do you want of me?”

He heard my cry and His answer was gentle.

“Will you glorify me even if I won’t reveal to you the end of this trial? Even if I don’t bring your father back to you?”

Honestly. I wanted to scream “No! No way! No how!”

But I knew that was the answer of my flesh. Not my heart.

Fighting God was more painful than waiting on Him.

So I whispered, “Okay.”

And I scribbled it in the sand. And took a picture to remind myself that I yielded to the Lord.

“Okay, Lord. I will glorify you even if I never get what I want. I will trust you with the outcome.”

I was flooded with peace as God inscribed into my summer-nights heart a reminder that He sees me, He has my heart, and He knows my life.

As the summer pressed on into the school year, *Hypomone* became my mission through nearly a half-dozen life-size trials. Visits to the ER with my husband. A near-death hospitalization. A week in California speaking culminating in losing my phone and being stuck at the airport. A ten-day battle with the flu. Heartbreaking news from a loved one. With each trial, I practiced glorifying God in the pain of the unknown. *Hypomone* became my life-style of worship. Even opening the doors for praise. Even in the silence, God was inscribing his love into my story heart.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your definition of perseverance? How would you explain it to a child?
2. How does your definition play out in your every-day life?
3. How do you glorify God, apart from time in church, worship, prayer, Bible reading?
4. What does it look like to persevere *hypomone*-style?
5. Is there a current trial, or situation, that requires you waiting on God, in which you could *hypomone* instead of running in fear or lashing out in anger?

GO deeper

Dig into the theology of suffering by reading these Scripture passages in the context of their chapters: Romans 3:4, Hebrews 12:1, Philippians 3:14, James 1:2-3. What do these verses teach you about persevering, suffering, and enduring? Also take time to gather praise verses to begin a lifestyle of giving thanks to God, in this moment, because of who He is, regardless of your circumstances. Consider Psalm 7:7, Psalm 8:9, Psalm 9:1, Psalm 13:5-6, Psalm 25:4-5.

Six

It is Only a Pause

Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Philippians 3:14

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The silence became my normal. One might even say I learned to trust God in the silence. I found comfort in the waiting, as I believed in my heart that God knew exactly what He was doing.

And then He shocked me.

God's mighty pause-breath was over.

He decided it was time to begin a new chapter.

But I was finally living life without my dad, totally content to receive God as my Father. I was even able to praise the Lord for the way He used the space of time to heal my soul and make me whole. I came to a place of no longer needing my father, yet I had this sacred place for him in my heart and was sincerely able to pray for his soul and general well being. The truest sign of my peace with God's plan was in being able to share with my children fond memories of my dad without a shred of bitterness or a drippy wet tear.

My life no longer felt like a cliff-hanger movie but rather the end of an other-than-fairytale story.

I thought the silence was the end.

But it was only a pause in the story God was writing on my heart, while He was writing a new story in my dad's heart, too.

A heart that was humble enough to apologize, acknowledge his own guilt, and seek restoration, at the perfect time my heart was able to receive it with grace and assured forgiveness.

We met for lunch a week later.

And a month later.

And four years to the date of our awful fight.

My father isn't who I want him to be but I do believe he is becoming the man God intended.

And the truth be told, I'm still becoming the woman God intended, too.

Reflection Questions

1. In the mighty-pause breath of God taking place in your life today, what have you learned about God? About yourself? About this world?
2. What would it take for you to see the "good" God is working in your life as you wait on "the end?"
3. Can you see how the Lord is using this silent time to accomplish a healing work in your life? In someone else's life?
4. Pray for eyes to see the hand of God and a clear direction in how to join Him in His work today.

GO deeper

Devote time today to reading chapter 8 of Romans. Read it slowly and thoughtfully. Look up a different translation at www.biblegateway.com to discover a new portion of this passage. What does God promise in these Scriptures? How can they apply to your life now? What are some specific instructions for how you can live while waiting on God?

Seven

*The Gift of a Story Heart**Acts 20:24*

*However, I consider my life worth nothing to me;
my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me
—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.*

I offer you the gift of my story heart to give you one perspective on what it means to wait and hope in the Lord, in His purposes, and in His plans. Through the trials I've faced, I've learned that when we shift our perspective off what we want God to do for us and into seeking His will for circumstances, we set ourselves free to receive from God exactly what we need. He provides us with peace, assurance of His love, and a place to live in His grace.

For more than two years, I told God exactly how He should bring about restoration with my father. He listened to me. But he didn't do it my way because it wasn't good for me nor my dad nor anyone else involved. His silence was discipline (Proverbs 3:12). But His silence was also extraordinary, God-size love.

I could tell you stories deep into the night about how my situation with my dad was used to challenge dozens and dozens of women and teenage girls to embrace forgiveness for their offenders and pursue healing of their own hardened hearts. In my pain, the Lord comforted me and made me to be a comforter to others (2 Corinthians 1:4). That process continues, even to this day, as my story is not yet finished. God is still about the business of restoring my soul, and likely yours. He is still committed to redemption in my father's life, in my life, and I suspect your's, too.

God's passion is to work through the lives of His people in such a way that the stories He writes brings Him glory while drawing others close to His heart and into the arms of His Savior Son. Hebrews 11 draws a story-picture of lives written for the glory of God, with leading characters who never entered the finale. Whether it is the story of Abraham and Isaac, Hannah and Samuel, David and Bathsheba, Zachariah and Elizabeth, or Mary and Joseph, not one of them saw the end they were striving for throughout their lives.

God is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 1:8). He knew the beginning before it began. He knows the end before He even gets there. He knows the finish line of our lives and all that takes place in the race we've set out to run.

Did you know that when a track is laid, they start with the end first? Yes, they need to know where the racers will finish, because that is the place to position the crowd -- the crowd who witnesses a story and participates in it, too! Every runner wants to cross the finish line with fans cheering them on! The end is determined first.

God has determined our end as well.

Our stories of unanswered prayers are ultimately testimonies of His purposes. When we find ourselves alone in our waiting to see God at work, we can put our hope and trust in His sovereign will. We can take stock of the fact that He knew us before we were even conceived (Psalm 139). He knows our days before we even live them.

By His grace, He both allows and enables us to strive toward that finish line. At the end of our race, it is not the crowd that matters. It is meeting our Savior face to face and hearing our Heavenly Father receive us home, knowing we ran the race well (Acts 20:24, 2 Timothy 4:7, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 2:2, 5:7, Hebrews 12:1), loving His Son, obeying His commands, and living as a testimony on this earth.

It was His plan from the very beginning to write a story of a Savior Son who rescued His children. The Scriptures capture these truths time and time again, becoming a foundation on which to build our faith. For those of us who believe in a Risen Savior, the Scriptures are life and breath and strength and power. But for those who have yet to meet Jesus, we are the God-story in flesh. He has made us to be a living testimony written for others to read, so that they can meet our Holy Savior. The question is, will we let God publish His story in our hearts, in His way and timing? Will we allow Him to shape the silence into a gift of His love for others, as He turns our lives into story hearts?

Reflection Questions

1. How has this study changed your thinking about your trials and the silence of God?
2. Are you ready to live *hypomone*-style, accepting the silence in which God will accomplish His purposes?
3. What is the first step you'll take to lay your story heart before the Lord as an offering today?

GO deeper

Congratulations! You've made it through this short study and still want to dig deeper. Open your Bible up and read through each of these passages. Look for Truth statements to cling to and carry with you as you seek to

glorify God in the waiting seasons of life: Proverbs 3:12 2 Corinthians 1:4 Revelation 1:8, Psalm 139, Acts 20:24, 2 Timothy 4:7, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 2:2 and 5:7, Hebrews 12:1. When you are ready, begin writing your story, even in short little pieces. Record your salvation moment. Note the trials and blessings through out your life. Look for those moments of God's faithfulness that you can share with others to build up their faith while strengthening your own.

A Scripture Journey

About the Heart

As I've experienced God turning my heart from stone to flesh, I've come to see the Biblical significance of the heart in so many new ways. The Word is packed with heart verses. The selection of Scriptures below are simply an overview designed for you to put your heart in perspective.

What makes a heart hardened?

- **The Heart Cherishing Sin**

Psalm 66:16-20 - If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened

- **Rebellion Hardens Our Hearts**

Hebrews 3:15 - As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

- **Arrogance and Pride Hardens the Heart -**

Daniel 5:20 - But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

What is the reality of your own heart?

- **The Heart's Inclination is Evil from Childhood**

Genesis 8:21 -The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

- **Out of Your Mouth**

Ecclesiastes 5:2 - Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

Matthew 12:34 - You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of

the heart the mouth speaks.

Luke 6:45 - The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

- **The Seed in Your Heart will Produce**

Luke 8:11-15 - "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. 12Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. 14The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. 15But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

- **The Deceitful Heart**

Jeremiah 17:9 - The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

- **The Bitter Heart**

Proverbs 14:10 - Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.

- **The Attitude of the Heart**

Hebrews 4:12 - For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

- **A Happy Heart Shows on our Faces**

Proverbs 15:13 - A happy heart makes the face cheerful

- **The Fearful Heart**

Isaiah 35:4 - say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come..."

What does God want for your heart?

- **To Believe with Your Hearts**

Romans 10:9-10

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

- **To Have Repentant Hearts**

Joel 2:12-13 - Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Rend your heart and not your garments.

- **To Have Hearts that Seek Him**

Psalms 27:8 - My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.

Colossians 3:1 - Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Jeremiah 29:13 - You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

- **To Love Him with All Your Heart**

Deuteronomy 6:5 - Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

- **To Love Others with a Pure Heart**

1 Timothy 1:5

The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

- **To Trust Him from Your Heart**

Proverbs 3:5-6 - Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

- **To Obey God in Your Heart**

Deuteronomy 30:1-3 - When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

- **To have an Undivided Heart**

Psalms 86:11 - Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

Jeremiah 32:39 - I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them.

- **To Serve from Your Heart**

1 Samuel 12:24 - But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart

- **To Work with Sincerity and All Your Heart**

Nehemiah 4:6 - for the people worked with all their heart.

Colossians 3:22-23 - but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men...

- **To be Humble in Your Hearts**

Psalms 131:1 - My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.

- **To Let Peace Rule Your Hearts**

Colossians 3:15 - Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts

- **To Make Music in Your Heart**

Ephesians 5:19-20 - Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord

- **To Give Him Your Broken Hearts**

Psalms 51:17 - The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

- **To be Pure of Heart**

Matthew 5:8 - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

- **To Set Your Hearts at Rest in His Presence**

1 John 3:19-21 - This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence 20whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

21Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God

What does God want to do with your heart?

- **God Looks at Your Heart**

1 Samuel 16:7 - But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

- **God Purifies Your Hearts**

Psalms 51:10 - Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

- **God Speaks to and Moves Your Hearts**

Nehemiah 2:12 - I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:1 - the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm

- **God Looks to Strengthen Your Hearts**

2 Chronicles 16:9 - For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

1 Thes 3:13 - May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

- **God Guards Your Hearts**

Phil 4:7 - And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- **The Spirit of His Son is in Your Hearts**

Galatians 4:6 - Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

- **God is Close to Your Broken Hearts**

Psalms 34:18 - The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalms 147:3 - He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

- **God Searches Your Hearts**

Psalms 7:9 - O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts...

- **The Lord Directs Your Hearts**

2 Thessalonians 3:5 - May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

What does God say about His heart?

- **God Speaks from His Heart**

Genesis 8:21 - The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done."

- **God Carries Us Close to His Heart**

Isaiah 40:11 - He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

If we choose to invest ourselves into studying the Scriptures, God will teach us through the Holy Spirit, who acts as our Counselor. We will see how the state of our hearts is a clear barometer on the state of our lives. If we also allow God, the Healer and Master Physician, to do a full-blown heart operation on our spiritual souls, we will find a healing from our brokenness like we've never known before. It isn't a once in a life-time operation. God needs daily access. The more open we are to His work on our hearts, the more rest, healing, and wholeness we will find in Him, and as we wait on Him. When we set our hearts at rest in his presence, the Lord will provide the peace we desperately need, found in the truth, and through the grace of Jesus Christ, our Lord, as we wait on God to accomplish His mighty purposes in our lives.

May God richly bless your commitment to Him and your study of the Word.

About the Author



Elisa Pulliam is a life coach, ministry leader, writer, and speaker passionate about encouraging and equipping this generation of women to impact the next generation with relevant Truth.

After more than a decade of mothering and nearly twenty years of mentoring teen girls coinciding with leading women's ministries online and in real life, Lisa is pretty in tune with the struggles of teens, twenty-somethings, and today's women. Her deepest desire is to facilitate heart and life transformation in others by offering practical, easily accessible, and Biblically sound life resources, which she shares on her ministry website, [More to Be](#), and with her [Passion and Purpose Life Coaching](#) clients.

As a speaker, Lisa is eager to connect with teens through today's women from every background and experience through story-telling as she shares her personal experience in the context of Biblical truth. Audiences respond to Lisa's approach, because she is transparent and authentic, and doesn't hold back from tossing in a good bit of laughter as she unravels the lessons of life.

Ultimately, Lisa thinks of herself as living at the gate called Beautiful (Acts 3), and offers forth all she has to give...her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. She knows He's the one that changes a person from the inside out and is the absolute reason she has experienced an authentic life transformed.

While Lisa's passions are all about sharing the Word with teens through today's women, she counts it pure joy to serve her family first and foremost. Her husband, Stephen, has been Christ-with-skin on to her for over 15 years, and her five children (four by birth and one by grace) have taught her the most about grace, love, pure affection, and total forgiveness.

Connect with Elisa online at [More to Be](#) and [Passion and Purpose Life Coaching](#).

Contact the Author

What is your story heart? Would you like to share it with me and possibly others, too. I'd love to hear from you. Email elisa@moretobe.com.

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Scripture references are from the New International Version unless noted.