

**LIFE
MAPS**

HIGHLAND PARK PRES

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WELCOME TO LIFE MAPPING

“Well, that’s my story ...” The group fell silent. The grace of God in Joe’s life was obvious to everyone. The whole group bonded together, identifying with Joe as he shared about his relationship with his father. Several of us felt real tugs at our hearts at that point in his story. We all felt like cheering when he shared how he discovered Christ.

Later he told us the difference our group had made in his life. Before our eyes Joe changed from an acquaintance to someone we really cared about. He became part of our small group. Starting at that point we became a team-with each of us encouraging the others from the sidelines. This scene is being repeated in group after group of Christians through a powerful tool that helps people “tell their story.”

In today’s culture relationships are hard to develop because people no longer have much sense of each other’s, or even their own, history.

A great way to get to know someone better is to hear their “life story.” One of the most powerful tools for helping people tell their story is the Life Map.

WHAT IS A LIFE MAP?

A Life Map is a visual representation of your life from birth to present that reveals more than just the facts; it shows both how your experiences and the significant people in your life contributed to “who you are now” as well as how God has worked in your life.

A Life Map can read like a diary for discerning God’s design in our lives because we begin seeing how “our story” fits into God’s “bigger story.” We can see how God has worked in our lives through our cooperation and despite our rebellion. A Life Map can also become a powerful presentation to others of how we are becoming a “living letter” of God’s grace (2 Corinthians 3:3).

BENEFITS OF LIFE MAPPING?

Preparing your Life Map and sharing it with a group can bring many benefits:

- **Community**—sharing your stories in a group creates a sense of shared understanding through mutual awareness and appreciation of each other
- **Uniqueness**—discern natural gifts through seeing patterns in life through what you enjoyed doing and did we
- **Knowing God**—tracking how God has been sovereign and gracious to you deepens your knowledge of Him and your appreciation of His personal involvement in your life
- **Obedience**—the biblical command, “Remember what God has done for you!” is repeated to motivate you to obedience
- **Vision**—seeing how God gifted and prepared you helps you see how to fulfill your role in His story; thus direction for the future can come through tracking His work in your life in the past (cf. Acts 13:36; Psalm 78:70-72)

PREPARING A LIFE MAP

Overviewing the Process: The Life Mapping process takes a few simple steps. In a nutshell, you brainstorm it, organize it and edit needless details. Then use your imagination to draw or creatively express the meanings you discover. You need not go through every step thoroughly but every effort you put into it is rewarding.

ONE – BRAINSTORM THE “BIG PICTURE”

At first you just brainstorm from memory the major events, relationships, and achievements of your life. Drawing a timeline may help jog your memory (use the “Life Map Worksheet” at the end of this booklet.)

As you gain the “Big Picture” of your life, look at the flow of events and details and try to observe the major periods or life stages. These can be distinguished by looking for any number of categories of details—geography, age, family/ relationship status, areas of endeavor, stages of activity, phases of maturity, major life issues or struggles, learning categories, etc. What types of periods you choose should be whatever ones best describe your life.

TWO – DISCERN “FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES”

Not all life experiences are equally significant. Some are formative—they contributed to who we are today.

By discerning formative experiences we gain deeper insight into ourselves—the dignity of our divine design and our depravity the shape which sin takes in our lives as a result of living in a fallen world.

You can use the “Life Map Worksheet” which comes with this booklet to help you focus on your formative experiences. Certain categories have proven fruitful for interpretation. Look especially for the following categories of life experience:

Heritage
Heroes
High Points
Hard Times
Hand of God

These questions will help clarify each area:

Heritage

What geographical, ethnic or family factors influenced you?
How? Why?

Heroes

What relationships played a major factor in influencing your character or shaping your direction (positively or negatively)?
How? Why?

Hard Times

What experiences were especially painful? Why?
How did they make you feel?

High Points

What experiences illustrate your special abilities? How did you get involved in them? What did you enjoy about them?
What did you do well? How do you know you did well?

Hand of God

What were your most transfiguring experiences or discoveries about God? When and how have you seen God's sovereignty and grace in your life story? How does "my story" fit into "God's Story?"

THREE – DISTILL YOUR STORY VISUALLY

Now you are ready to translate what you have discovered into a creative distillation in order to share it with others. This is definitely a right brain activity which helps you to synthesize and equips you to communicate more powerfully. Think of the process of actually creating your Life Map as "painting a portrait" of your life.

It can be drawn any way you like - a picture, faces, symbols; a mountain range, a picture of a tree with various branches representing aspects of your life; a map with miniature pictures of friends and places you've lived; a river; or any other way that you'd like to depict your life story.

Not everyone is gifted as a writer or an artist, but you can polish your Life Map presentation so that it will communicate clearly. Most commonly, this can be done with a word picture or a graphic illustration.

IMPORTANT TIPS

Summarize Themes and Edit!

For each period or stage of life you have identified, summarize its details into a central subject which is characteristic. Keep the significant details of one or perhaps two examples of that period's characteristic theme. To begin with, what historical/geographical details of my life are absolutely necessary to provide a framework for each part of my story? Edit out as much of the rest as is possible without losing continuity.

Creatively Express the Form of Your Presentation

After summarizing each section of your Life Map, brainstorm to see if you can come up with creative pictures to illustrate the most significant themes. If you can draw, you don't need advice; if you can't, don't despair of being visual. You can cut out magazine pictures, or enlarge clip art-if you can imagine it, you can find an easy way to do it.

There no need to worry if you do not feel you are the "creative type." Remember, a picture really is worth a thousand words even if it is cut out of a magazine!

Look at an Example

You may find it helpful to see a biblical character's Life Map. In the attached example imagine King David from the Old Testament were to come into a group and present his Life Map to you.

UNDERSTANDING THE EXAMPLE

Summarizing Broad Processes

Notice the summary of his early, middle and later years in terms of the broad process going on, “becoming a leader after God’s heart.” These are even divided through stages: early years, King Saul’s court, fugitive, Kingdom, sinning & repenting, and hard final years. You can see the overall development going through “ups” and “downs.”

Visualizing Ideas with Pictures: You can see that much is said with few words through pictures. Any kind of images could work.

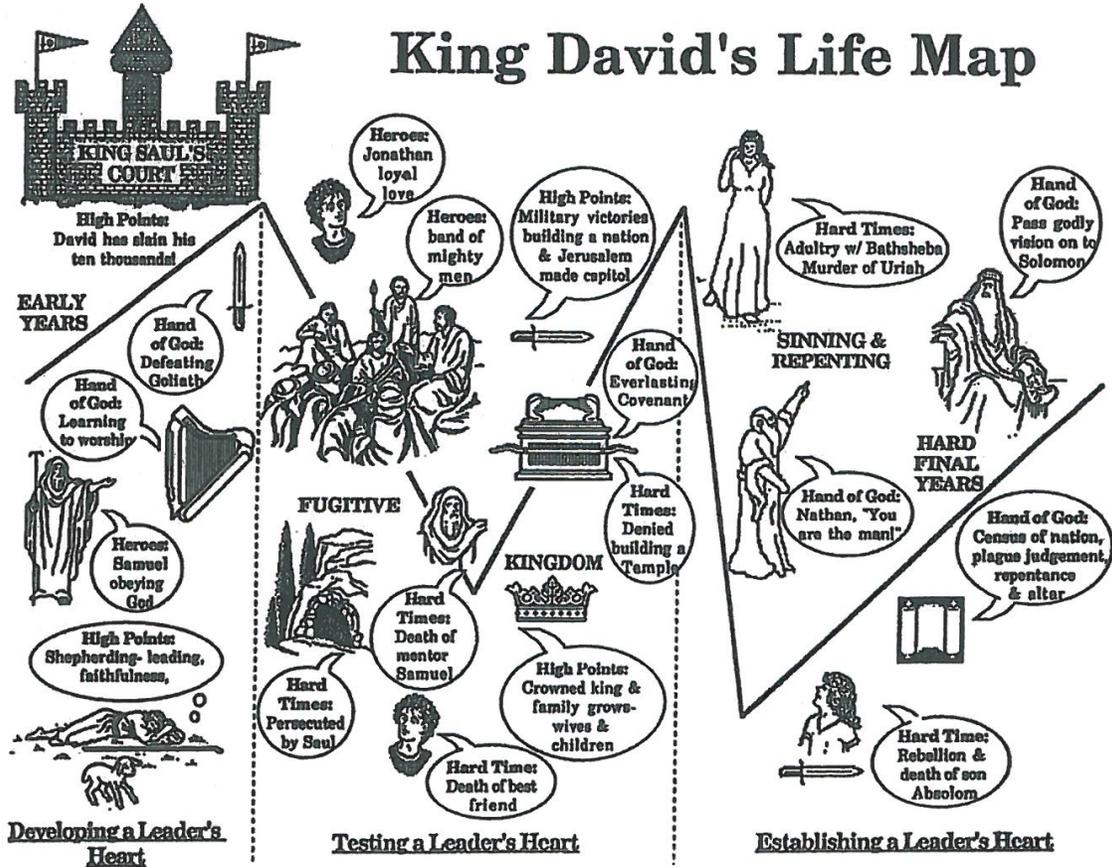
Size

The whole Life Map would be large enough for everyone to see easily and none of the speech balloons would be seen. The speech balloons represent what David might talk about.

Highlighting Formative Experiences

Notice how formative experiences are highlighted. It might take quite a while to read his entire biography from the pages of Scripture. Yet David could help you get a feel for his whole life in about 30 minutes through his Life Map!

King David's Life Map



HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY

Now you are ready to share your Life Map before a group. This is the greatest part of all. Here we find connection and affirmation. Some find this a little scary or worry they cannot speak well before others. Not to worry, a person's story is inherently interesting.

You will be surprised at how encouraged people are as they listen.

PRESENTING A PREPARED LIFE MAP

Attach it to a wall or any flat surface with something that will not damage the surface. Place it high enough for everyone to see (remember, draw it large enough for easy visibility). Stand to the side of it while you talk so that others can see and so you can use it for a reminder to stay on track.

As you tell your life story in 30 minutes, remember to:

- Highlight formative experiences—the highest and lowest points of your life, and significant relationships, mentors or heroes in your life.
- Share stories where you did something that you especially enjoyed doing and did it well.
- Take the risk of sharing experiences of pain and/or struggle if they are relevant to showing who you are now.
- Recognize God's grace and faithfulness in drawing your story into his story.

APPROPRIATE AUTHENTICITY IN SHARING A LIFE MAP

As you look for pivotal points in change, growth or direction, be authentic. Appropriate authenticity means that with the events, relationships or issues in which you excelled or struggled you need to ask whether you are revealing the honest emotional impact you experienced from what occurred. You are performing emotional striptease by sharing everything, but model transparency about significant influences in the direction of your life. When sharing about a moral or spiritual failure, use discretion. Be honest about the issues but not graphic about the detail.

RESPONDING TO LIFE MAPS

THE GIFT OF ATTENTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

The other important part of Life Mapping is listening to others share theirs and encouraging them. It has been said that one of the greatest gifts you can give another person is your undivided attention. After a person has taken the risk to share their life story with a group, they have a great need for affirmation. When people in the group respond to the sharer with acceptance and encouragement it completes the circuit that ignites community. God releases incredible power for life change as we experience through others the grace of acceptance having risked authenticity.

EMPATHY AND DISCERNMENT

As you listen to others share their life, put yourself in their shoes and try to identify with them. Great insights which discern what makes a person tick are wasted if you fail to make them in the right spirit of love and empathy. Better to hold your insights and be encouraging than to speak and have the person about whom you had made discerning observations feel, “Those are great insights, but I’m not sure that person really cares about me.”

A PATTERN FOR RESPONDING

A simple format for responding to someone’s Life Map might be:

Appreciation

Listeners can respond by telling things they appreciate about each person’s story.

Exploration

Listeners ask clarifying questions about points of interest.

Application

The group leader can then ask the person who shared their Life Map if there is anything the group can do for them. Are there any present struggles, road-blocks, or anxieties the group can pray for?

Have a great time telling your stories. May God make His story the power that develops friendships and changes lives!

