

**LESLIE LEYLAND FIELDS**

# **YOUR STORY MATTERS**

**FINDING, WRITING,  
AND LIVING THE TRUTH  
OF YOUR LIFE**

**NavPress** 

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# SEVEN “FEAR NOTS!” OF WRITING YOUR STORY

IN THE BIBLE, whenever God or his messengers showed up, in dazzling brilliance, to issue a task, a call, people fell down in terror. *Who, me?* So many times the divine response was, *Fear not!* Here, then, are the Seven “Fear Nots!” of Writing Your Story.

1. **Fear not! that your story doesn’t matter.** It matters immensely to God, who is the author of your story. As the writer of your story, you’re in charge of making it matter to your readers. Remember, we write not only for ourselves, to discover wisdom, truth, and beauty in the simplest and hardest moments of our lives, but we write for our readers as well, who are also on a faith journey.
2. **Fear not! that you have nothing “new” to contribute to the world.** Listen to Madeleine L’Engle: “My husband is my most ruthless critic. . . . Sometimes he will say, ‘It’s been said better before.’ Of course. It’s all been said better before. If I thought I had to say it better than anybody else, I’d never start. Better or worse is immaterial. The thing is that it has to be said; by me. . . . We each have to say it, to say it our own

way. . . . Good or bad, great or little: that isn't what human creation is about. It is that we have to try; to put it down in pigment, or words, or musical notes, or we die."

3. **Fear not! that you're not a good enough writer to accomplish your goal.** None of us is good enough to finish a project when we start. Some of us aren't even good enough to start! By the time we finish, though, we have become more than good enough. The struggle, the long hours, and the word-wrangling and prayer-wrestling will get you there day by day.
4. **Fear not! that you don't have enough time to write.** Of course you don't. No one does. But if you are serious about this calling and this project, you will find a way to reorder your life: stop watching TV, write while the kids are napping, get up two hours earlier than everyone else, take your manuscript with you on vacation. Yes, it costs you. Nothing of great value is free. Count the cost to everyone. Then, if you're still so moved, make room and carry on.
5. **Fear not! that you won't finish what you start.** The beauty of writing life stories is that every piece you write is a story saved from the Closet of the Forgotten. Don't let guilt or perfectionism steal the joy and wonder of whatever you're able to do.
6. **Fear not! that people will reject you when they hear your story.** I can make no promises about people's responses but know that most of us struggle with the same battles and afflictions. If the sharing of your experience offers meaningful wisdom and hope to others, then write it and tell it. Your courage and authenticity will help others move past masks toward truth-telling and healing.

7. **Fear not! that no one will read your work.** Someone *will* read your work. Maybe a few friends, your family, the ones you really care about; maybe thousands of strangers. No one knows this when they are writing, and it has nothing to do with the work. Just get on with the writing and editing, and trust that your life stories will find the people who need and cherish them the most.

# RESOURCES

## ***Selected Spiritual Memoirs***

- Barnes, Kim. *In the Wilderness: Coming of Age in Unknown Country*. New York: Anchor Books, 1997.
- Adiele, Faith. *Meeting Faith: The Forest Journals of a Black Buddhist Nun*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005.
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- Cairns, Scott. *Short Trip to the Edge: A Pilgrimage to Prayer*. Orleans, MA: Paraclete Press, 2016.

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- Finneran, Kathleen. *The Tender Land: A Family Love Story*. Boston: Mariner, 2003.
- Gallagher, Nora. *Things Seen and Unseen: A Year Lived in Faith*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.
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- Lamott, Anne. *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*. New York: Anchor Books, 2000.
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- Lewis, C. S. *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. New York: HarperOne, 2017.
- Lynch, Thomas. *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2009.
- Mairs, Nancy. *Ordinary Time: Cycles in Marriage, Faith, and Renewal*. Boston: Beacon, 1993.
- Mandelker, Amy, and Elizabeth Powers, eds. *Pilgrim Souls: An Anthology of Spiritual Autobiographies*. New York: Touchstone, 1999.
- Manning, Brennan. *All Is Grace: A Ragamuffin Memoir*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2015.

- Manning, Martha. *Chasing Grace: Reflections of a Catholic Girl, Grown Up*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.
- Miller, Donald. *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years: What I Learned While Editing My Life*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011.
- Norris, Kathleen. *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*. New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993.
- Schwartz, Mimi. *Good Neighbors, Bad Times: Echoes of My Father's German Village*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2009.
- Winner, Lauren. *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*. New York: HarperOne, 2013.
- Zaleski, Philip, ed. *The Best Spiritual Writing*, annual series.

## **Selected Books on Writing**

- Writer's Market* (annual reference guide) by Writer's Digest Books
- Christian Writers' Market Guide* (annual reference guide) by Christian Writers Institute
- Allender, Dan B. *To Be Told: God Invites You to Coauthor Your Future*. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2006.
- Chandler McEntyre, Marilyn. *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2016.
- Hamp, Patricia, and Elaine Tyler May, eds. *Tell Me True: Memoir, History, and Writing a Life*. St. Paul, MN: Borealis Books, 2011.
- Jacobs, Alan. *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

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- L'Engle, Madeleine. *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art*. New York: Convergent Books, 2016.
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- Marinella, Sandra. *The Story You Need to Tell: Writing to Heal from Trauma, Illness, or Loss*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2017.
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- Ryken, Leland. *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing*. Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2002.
- Zinsser, William. *Writing About Your Life: A Journey into the Past*. New York: Da Capo Press, 2005.



# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 6.

## CHAPTER ONE: YOUR BIGGER STORY

1. Name has been changed.
2. Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 30.
3. Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 137.
4. Patricia Hampl, *I Could Tell You Stories: Sojourns in the Land of Memory* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 18.
5. *Fall of*: Matthew 10:29; *wandering of*: Matthew 18:12-14; *strand of*: Luke 21:18.

## CHAPTER TWO: YOUR FULLER STORY

1. Deuteronomy 24:18, esv. Emphasis added.
2. Exodus 10:2, NKJV.
3. Judges 8:34, RSV.
4. Dan Allender and Don Hudson, "Forgetting to Remember: How We Run from Our Stories," *Mars Hill Review* 8 (Summer 1997): 65.
5. James W. Pennebaker and Joshua M. Smyth, *Opening Up by Writing It Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain*, 3rd ed. (New York: Guilford, 2016), 10-11.
6. Patricia Hampl, *I Could Tell You Stories* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 18.
7. Ecclesiastes 1:1.

8. Samson: Judges 16:28-30; Jonah: Jonah 4; Ananias and Sapphira: Acts 5:1-11; Stephen: Acts 7:54-60.

#### CHAPTER THREE: YOUR OUTER STORY

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*, (2012), s.v. “scene.”
2. The Writing Cooperative, “What Is a Scene in a Novel?,” July 14, 2018, <https://writingcooperative.com/what-is-scene-in-a-novel-8f08df1dba94>.
3. Census of Marine Life, “How Many Species on Earth? About 8.7 Million, New Estimate Says,” *ScienceDaily*, August 24, 2011, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/08/110823180459.htm>.
4. “Origin of ‘Kentucky,’ State Symbols USA, accessed September 19, 2019, <https://statesymbolsusa.org/symbol-official-item/kentucky/state-name-origin/origin-kentucky>.
5. “Todd Name Meaning,” *Ancestry.com*, accessed September 19, 2019, <https://www.ancestry.com/name-origin?surname=todd>.
6. Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: YOUR STORIES TOGETHER

1. Psalm 19:1-2, 4, ESV.
2. Luke 19:40, author’s paraphrase.
3. To learn more, see <https://www.facebook.com/galleytables/>.
4. Romans 12:15, ESV.
5. Psalm 96:3, ESV.
6. 1 Corinthians 14:26, BSB.

#### CHAPTER FIVE: YOUR INNER STORY

1. Jacques Maritain, “Christian Art,” from *Art and Scholasticism* in Leland Ryken, ed., *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing* (Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, 2002), 53–54, emphasis author’s.

#### CHAPTER SIX: YOUR HEALING STORY

1. Patricia Hampl, “The Self that Can Render the World,” interview by Mira Rosenthal at the 2006 Krakow Poetry Seminar, <http://patriciahampl.com/about/interviews/>.
2. Anne Lamott, “There’s a whole chapter on perfectionism in *Bird by Bird*,” Facebook, May 12, 2014, as quoted here: <https://wordsoftheyear.com/2014/05/12/anne-lamott-on-perfectionism-people-pleasing-and-jiggly-thighs/>.
3. Ephesians 4:25, 32.
4. Mary Oliver, “The Summer Day,” *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 316.
5. “Award-Winning Writer Patricia Hampl to Deliver Fairfield University’s

- 4th Annual Catholicism and the Arts Lecture,” Fairfield University (press release), October 9, 2009, <https://www.fairfield.edu/news/press-releases/2009/october/awardwinning-writer-patricia-hampl-to-deliver-fairfield-universitys-4th-annual-catholicism-and-the-arts-lecture.html>.
6. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Edinburgh; Black & White Classics, 2014), 7.
  7. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth ed. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 652–53.
  8. As quoted in Ute Lawrence, *The Power of Trauma: Conquering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse Star, 2009), xv.

#### CHAPTER SEVEN: YOUR FOCUSED STORY

1. Ezekiel 37:12, 14.

#### CHAPTER EIGHT: YOUR STRUCTURED STORY

1. Written in a letter to the family of Michele Besso, as quoted in Dan Falk, “A Debate over the Physics of Time,” *Quanta Magazine*, July 19, 2016, <https://www.quantamagazine.org/a-debate-over-the-physics-of-time-20160719/>.
2. Ephesians 1:4.
3. Ephesians 1:10.
4. Matthew 22:39.
5. From “The Figure a Poem Makes,” Frost’s preface to his 1939 collected poems; see <https://www.poeticous.com/frost/the-figure-a-poem-makes>.
6. Frederick Buechner, *The Clown in the Belfry: Writings on Faith and Fiction* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 78.
7. Quoted in Jon Winokur, comp. and ed., *Advice to Writers: A Compendium of Quotes, Anecdotes, and Writerly Wisdom from a Dazzling Array of Literary Lights* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 170.
8. Leslie Leyland Fields, *Surviving the Island of Grace* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2002), 329–30.

#### CHAPTER NINE: YOUR SHARED STORY

1. Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 72.
2. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988), 65.
3. Madeleine L’Engle, *A Circle of Quiet* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), Section 1.9.
4. Genesis 1:27.
5. Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).
6. John Milton, “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent,” <https://poets.org/poem/when-i-consider-how-my-light-is-spent>.

Your Story Matters. For a lot of us, this has been a rough year, a tiring year, a painful year. Some years carry a heavier toll than others, and this is one of them. Yet in spite of that " or maybe because of it " there's something you need to do: tell your story. I know how tired you are. I know some of you you don't feel heard. I know some of you might fear you don't matter. You do. Your story matters phrase handwritten on blackboard with heart symbol instead of O. Conceptual hand writing showing Your Story Matters. Business photo text share your experience Diary Express feelings in writing. Word writing text Your Story Matters. Business concept for share your experience Diary Express feelings in writing. Handwriting text Your Story Matters. Concept meaning share your experience Diary Express feelings in writing. Text sign showing Your Story Matters. Your Story Matters presents a dynamic and spiritually formative process for understanding and redeeming the past in order to live well in the present and into the future. Leslie Leyland Fields has used and taught this practical and inspiring writing process for decades, helping people from all walks of life to access memory and sift through the truth of their stories.