

DAVID EDWARDS

life
verse

DISCOVERING
THE POWER OF SCRIPTURE
IN YOUR STORY



“This book is a masterful study of an important but neglected subject: the importance of the ‘life verse’ in the Christian life. My heart burned within me as I moved from chapter to chapter. I wish I had read a book like this decades ago. *Life Verse* is a remarkable blending of biblical truth and practical counsel. Young believers and veteran Christians will both benefit from reading this book. I got so caught up in *Life Verse* that I read it in one sitting! May the Lord use this book to help revive His needy church.”

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of Moody Church, author of the Be Series of Bible studies

“Dave has been a friend for years and is one of the most effective communicators I know. He’s passionate, creative, direct, and hilarious. Dave has a unique way of helping you understand complex biblical truths in a simple, digestible way. In this important book, Dave will guide you prayerfully toward discovering a verse from the Bible to help guide your decisions, direct your path, and define your future. My life verse is Acts 20:24.”

Craig Groeschel, lead pastor of LifeChurch.tv

“David Edwards is one of the best teachers I know. He has mastered the art of bringing the Word alive in an engaging way that offers practical solutions for everyday living. *Life Verse* is a wonderful approach to the personal application of God’s promises for your life. Transformation is inevitable.”

Michelle McKinney Hammond, author of *Right Attitudes for Right Living*

“One word from God can make all the difference. Perhaps this is nowhere more true than when God uses one passage of Scripture to direct and guide our lives. In these pages David Edwards helps you discover your life verse as well as encouragement and hope for your future. My life verse is Isaiah 43:1-4.”

Margaret Feinberg, author of *Wonderstruck*

“The Scriptures have inspired some of the greatest verses of my life and music. Dave and I have been friends for a long time; he and his book are for real. Dave’s writing is easy to follow, friendly, compassionate, engaging, and motivating; his stories are great, and I always enjoy his humor. *Life Verse* is a clever, creative, yet practical book. It unlocks the value of finding your story in God’s Story. This book will help you discover your life verse.”

Bart Millard, lead singer of MercyMe

“In *Life Verse*, David Edwards shows us how influential even one verse from God’s holy Word can be in transforming your life. I learned a lot reading this book and highly recommend it!”

Kylie Bisutti, author of *I’m No Angel*

“David Edwards is one of my favorite speakers and writers. And *Life Verse* is like a bolt of lightning. It heightens your senses, illuminates the darkness, and changes the situation. In this day and age of noise and chatter, it is imperative that we all discover and share our story. This is what makes you *you*. *Life Verse* uses the grid of Scripture to help us clarify and redefine who we really are. My life verse is Matthew 6:33. This book is a must-read for all who are serious about impacting this generation.”

Dr. Jay Strack, president and founder of Student Leadership University

“Whether in the pulpit or on the page, David Edwards is one of the most effective communicators I know. David’s practical, biblically grounded wisdom and personal example will help you discover the power of Scripture in your story. Your life verse will adjust the way you see yourself and the world around you. My life verse is Proverbs 20:7. Read this book—it will lift you up.”

Dr. Johnny M. Hunt, senior pastor of First Baptist Woodstock, Woodstock, GA

“My friend David Edwards has served us well with this book. In a style all his own, he takes some ancient practices that have shaped the lives of Jesus’ followers for centuries and brings a freshness of language and insight to them. David acts as a wise guide on this journey of interacting with the truth of the Scriptures so that we don’t miss the point: to see, know, and love God. My life verse is 1 Timothy 1:15-16.”

Jerry Gillis, lead pastor of The Chapel, Getzville, NY

“David Edwards knows the best story is the one whose life is contained in God’s story. *Life Verse* helps you discover the landmark in your own spiritual story. As you embark on the journey of looking for your life verse, David helps you mine for gold in finding your spiritual treasure. I wish I would have had this book forty years ago when I was digging for my life verse. David is right—there is power in Scripture in your story. My life verse has been John 3:30.”

Ken Whitten, senior pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church, Lutz, FL

“In *Life Verse*, David Edwards has focused the spotlight on the absolute necessity of absorbing the Word of God into your life. This book will be a tool in changing your perspective, your attitude, and your life as it equips you to address every situation with Scripture and to unite your pursuits with God’s direction. My life verse is Romans 1:16.”

Alex Himaya, lead pastor of theChurch.at, Tulsa, OK

“I’ve known David Edwards a long time. The people described in this book achieved their potential as they found their life verse! You can be one of those people if you read and apply the great insight found in these pages. David has helped me, and he will do the same for you. God has a life verse for you. Happy hunting as you read *Life Verse*; you’ll never be the same.”

Dr. Chris Stephens, lead pastor of Faith Promise Church, Knoxville, TN

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verse

DISCOVERING THE POWER OF SCRIPTURE IN YOUR STORY

DAVID EDWARDS

NAVPRESS 

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with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

*For my mom, Dorothea Ann Edwards, for showing me how
to live my life verse and to write about it in the same way*



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INTRODUCTION

The Power of One Verse

CAN ONE VERSE from the Bible really change your life? Yes. Yes it can.

Life can be repetitive and often predictable. We get into our deep ruts, and it can become hard to see out over the edges with truth and fresh perspective. But the right verse can cut through the fog of routine, low-level living.

The power of a well-chosen verse can change, convict, confront, and cleanse. A verse can liberate, empower, deliver, reenergize, and reorient to a way of seeing and living. Word by word, line by line, the holy sentences change the nature and direction of present events. Long-believed personal limitations are left in the dust, negative patterns are dismantled, and the heart and mind are awakened to new possibilities.

A verse that changes your life? It's not a new idea. God's followers throughout history have been familiar with the phenomenon.

Followers like Martin Luther, who found a verse that would not only change his life but would alter the course of history. He read Romans 1:17, "The righteous man shall

live by faith,” and saw that salvation and righteous living were a gift God offered with no strings attached. The local church of his day taught that works and sacraments were also necessary for righteousness before God, so Luther wrote his Ninety-Five Theses, a bold act that triggered the Protestant Reformation.

Followers like William Wilberforce, who read Galatians 3:28, where Paul declared, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” These words weighed heavy on his heart, to the point where he fought to abolish the slavery that had become so deeply embedded in the culture and economy of the British Empire.

Followers like Fanny Crosby, who lost her sight at six weeks of age but held on to 1 John 3:2: “Beloved, now we are children of God, and . . . when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” She saw Jesus with the eyes of her heart, writing some of the most glorious hymns of modern-day Christianity.

Followers like William Cary, who took Mark 16:15 to heart (“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation”) and spent forty-one years as a missionary to India, laying the foundation for nine translations of the Bible, advocating for education and social reform, and inspiring countless other missionaries after him.

Followers like Dr. Bill Bright, a businessman shaped by Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” This verse inspired Dr. Bright to start Campus Crusade for Christ and to write a gospel booklet that has

become one of the most widely used tools in evangelism around the world.

Billy Graham. Romans 5:8: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” His ministry has shared this message all over the globe.

Heidi Baker. Matthew 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Orphan children are fed, clothed, and sheltered.

Dawson Trotman. Second Timothy 2:2: “Entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” He began the ministry known as The Navigators; people all over the world have been discipled because he let one verse shape his life.

You get the idea. Of course, all of these people read and lived the whole Bible, but each of them discovered one verse that served as a frame, a guide for each unique life. A single verse has the power to change a life and, in so doing, to change the world. No one doubts that what God accomplished through these people—and through millions of other God-followers—He accomplished through the power of Scripture. Each with a life verse firmly fixed, these people made God-honoring choices, overcame incredible odds, persevered, and rose above the challenges of sameness to accomplish the will of God. In each case, the voice of God in Scripture broke through.

When we take a verse seriously, it creates profound change in our reality, it taps into creative resources of faith, it welcomes bold imagination, it fosters new compassion for the hurts of others, it opens us up to the help of God’s Spirit, and it surprises us with confidence that God is our future.

The way of the future lies in reaching back. Back to the rich texts of Scripture, back into the world of God's Word. Then we rediscover God's Word, and we hear it speaking from the world in which it was written, into the world we now inhabit. A life verse helps us look at our world from God's perspective.

The purpose of this book is to assist you in the process of reading and hearing the Word of God, to help you to reach back into the world of God's Word to discover your life verse for living in this world.

I make a distinction between *finding* and *discovering* a life verse. While I was researching, I found many websites that presented pages of Scripture and encouraged believers to pick a verse they liked. Clicking and picking is not the focus of this book. Rather, this book will help you read the Bible with a receptive heart, and out of that reading God will speak, and you will discover the life verse He has chosen for you.

This book is presented in four parts. In Part I, "Re-Verse: Trading Our Old Stories," we confront the stories that began at the earliest moments of our lives and have given us identity. The stories we choose to live are our attempt to make sense of traumatic and difficult events. Our stories come fully equipped with the promise that we will be safe and loved. As we grow up, it becomes evident that we are emotionally, physically, or spiritually stuck in an old story; we have in fact been living out a death sentence. Discovering your life verse begins by recognizing your old story and realizing that God has a new one for you to live. Your life verse serves as the opening line of your new story.

Part II, “Well-Versed: The World of the Life Verse,” explains what your life verse will do for you—and what it won’t. This section introduces and expands on several important life verses: What do we learn from the life verse of the nation Israel? How does the birth of Mary’s life verse help us understand how to find ours? What about Jesus—what was His life verse? I’ll also let you in on my life verse and how it found me.

Part III, “Chapter and Verse: Reading for Your Life Verse,” is about sitting down and opening up the pages of Scripture to let it infiltrate our souls, which requires us to tune our hearts and souls. Life comes to us through the pages—life that becomes real to us as we read the Bible humbly and expectantly. Reading Scripture brings us into the world of God.

Part IV is “Uni-Verse: Discovering Your Life Verse.” Knowing where to begin can seem like a daunting task. Thankfully, finding your life verse is not all up to you. In this section I’ll unpack how the help of the Spirit brings insight and understanding as you read Scriptures, so you can discover and live out your life verse.

Along the way I’ve provided a few questions here and there to help you think through and apply the principles of this book. You’ll also find, in chapters 12–14, a personal inventory that will help you discover and explore your life verse.

Read on, take the information to heart, and begin the journey of discovering your life verse. I recommend you take time with each chapter, digest the truth it contains, and let the Lord challenge, stretch, and lead you through the discovery process.

PART I

RE-VERSE: TRADING OUR OLD STORIES

THE ATMOSPHERE backstage at Christian music events is not like being backstage at a typical rock concert. Instead of drugs, alcohol, or groupies, you find fruit, water, and a tray of Chick-fil-A, while amiable musicians sit quietly disengaged from their surroundings, staring into their laptops as they place bids on cool gear on eBay.

Which made the man standing backstage at this particular show even more conspicuous. I made a casual inventory and noticed he was five foot eleven, a solid 230 pounds, with long salt-and-pepper hair and an even longer beard to match. He sported a black leather vest with a brown cross embroidered across its back, worn over a plaid shirt, completed with well-traveled jeans and boots. He was terminally cool. He could've been anything from a rock star to a hit man.

He also had a wallet on a chain, just like mine. Fascinated, I pointed to it.

“Hey, cool wallet,” I said, pulling mine from my back pocket.

He smiled warmly. “Oh, nice,” he said.

By this point I figured there was a motorcycle in this guy’s life. “What do you ride?” I asked.

“A black Harley Electra Glide,” he said enthusiastically, extending his hand. “I’m Jim Gillespie.”

Jim’s welcoming countenance made it obvious that he loved Jesus, so I briefly introduced myself, then asked him, “What do you do?”

“I’m pastor of men’s ministry at Richland Creek Community Church.”

I was surprised. “What?” I said. “But where’s your golf shirt with embroidered church logo?”

We laughed, and then Jim told me his story:

I grew up in an abusive home. My alcoholic dad had been in and out of prison for most of his life, and he regularly beat my mom. She moved us to a little town called West Grove, near Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It didn’t take long to figure out that I could do whatever I wanted; by eighth grade I was already drinking and smoking pot. From there I escalated to doing cocaine, LSD, and meth, and dealing drugs. By tenth grade I’d been expelled. At seventeen I was living with my pregnant girlfriend; by eighteen I was a single dad working odd jobs and selling drugs.

Into these dark days shone a ray of hope. I met

my wife, Laurie, and we moved to Texas. She inspired me to attempt to live right, but my habits were stronger than my desire, and it didn't take long for me to turn back to my selfish ways. I started staying out late and drinking. I had become like my dad.

I still remember the night Laurie told me I was the most hateful person she had ever met. I knew she was right and told her if I were her, I'd leave me.

She raised her voice: "Lucky for you, God's Word won't let me leave you! So I'm staying and I'll be praying for you."

Old habits die hard—I went from bad to worse, joining a motorcycle gang called The Scorpions. I would leave for days, drinking, partying, and spending all our money—

I interrupted him. "A motorcycle gang?"

He nodded and continued:

You have to be bad to be in one. Well, I was so bad they made me leave! You know you're really bad when thieves and drug dealers tell you to get out. Like a bike with no brakes, I was headed downhill. I spent the next two years in depression and rarely left the house.

I found Laurie's Bible and began reading through the Gospels. I read every day, page by page, verse by

verse. Like a scalpel, God's Word peeled back the layers of my life until I saw myself for who I really was: a liar, a drunk, a drug addict, a thief, and a stranger to my own family.

Then I read about a woman who loved much because she'd been forgiven much. I knew I had plenty I needed to be forgiven for. I kept reading every day until I read about a thief next to Jesus who was saved at the last minute. The Spirit brought that story to life for me: I was that thief, dying a criminal's death.

The gospel flooded my mind, and I stood to my feet and cried out to God, "If You'll take me just the way I am, You can have me from this day forward! I'm all Yours."

That was the day Jesus saved this renegade and outlaw.

I continued reading the Bible. I read Acts and got involved in church and connected with a mentor. Then I read Romans, and that's where God gave me a verse to memorize and meditate on, a verse that gave shape to my life and ministry.

What is it? There in our backstage conversation Jim pushed up his shirtsleeve, stretched out his right arm, and showed me a tattoo of two characters, each a little smaller than a playing card. They were the numbers 5:8. Jim's life verse is Romans 5:8: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

DAVID EDWARDS



We'd like to hear your story. Please visit YourLifeVerse.org and share how you discovered your life verse and how the Lord has worked through it in your life.

CHAPTER 1

Listen to Your Life

YOUR LIFE is saying something to you.

Jim Gillespie's story is the perfect illustration of the way each of us can trade in an old story for a new one. A choice is set before each one of us: We can choose to live a story that, in the end, will kill us and everything else that is good about our lives. Or we can choose life.

Like Jim, you can discover within the pages of Scripture a perspective-changing, direction-focusing verse for your life. That's what happened for Rick Barry, my friend and youth pastor at Keystone Fellowship in Souderton, Pennsylvania:

When I was a senior in high school, my senior pastor challenged me to not just read my Bible, but to get to know God's heart behind each book of the Bible. He challenged me to read and study a book of the Bible

each day for an entire month. I started off with the book of 2 Timothy, and then began to work my way through all of the Epistles.

During my freshman year of college at Michigan State University, I had been praying that God would give me boldness like never before. I wanted to be a light to that campus, and I wanted to make the most of every opportunity that I had to share the gospel. However, I continually found myself intimidated by my peers and (in my mind) their lack of desire to hear about the things of God. One day, I had a clear chance to bring up Christ in a conversation with my friend but completely chickened out. I let fear get the best of me, and I left feeling like a complete failure.

When I got back to my dorm room, I spent time praying. I asked Christ to forgive me and give me the strength not to miss out on any more opportunities like that again. I then opened up my Bible to read the book of Philippians for the day; I'd been reading this one book over and over for three months. Before I began reading I simply prayed, "God, show me something today to help me have boldness so that You will be glorified." As I read through chapter 1, I came across Philippians 1:21, which I had underlined. But this time as I was reading, God opened my eyes to Philippians 1:20, which is a prayer that Paul prayed for himself. For the first time, it popped out at me. The verse says:

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. (NIV)

My eyes were opened to the vulnerability in Paul's prayer, and I began to pray that for myself. I prayed it when I was in my dorm, on the bus, in class, at parties. I prayed it everywhere. As months passed, I was still praying that for myself. I came to realize that Philippians 1:20 was not just a verse that I wanted to be true while I was in college, but I wanted it to be true for all my life. I realized that wherever I was, whatever I was doing, whenever I was doing it, I never wanted to be ashamed, but I wanted sufficient courage so that Christ would be exalted in my life, whether by life or by death.

My life verse is the prayer that God showed me, which I continually pray and want to be true for my life!

What's your story? Maybe it's one in which every day seems filled with the same struggles. Get up, get ready, go to work, go home, go to bed—only to start the cycle all over again. Feeling trapped in life, people look for distraction—something to numb the pain, a way to get away from it all. But this only creates more frustration. Avoiding life's struggles is not the answer.

Life can sometimes feel like a hamster's journey on his

wheel. During these times it's quite easy to drift off into fantasy, dreaming about all the different ways we might achieve happiness, running mental video clips of better circumstances and more loving people. All those images and dreams have a way of cluttering our heads, bogging us down with so many pseudo-options that we don't know what to do next. We begin to feel like there is no way out.

We are capable of making a new choice to see life as a gift, starting a new story in which everything propels us in a positive direction. Jesus acknowledged, "In this world you will have trouble." Then He continued, "But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NIV). We will learn much more about this new story later in this book, but first let's muster the courage to take a close look at the old story.

Do joy and contentment seem to elude you? If you've ever felt as though life is unfair, don't blame bad karma or bad luck or even necessarily bad judgment. The real cause is something deeply embedded inside you that governs and directs everything in your life. It's your old story.

I'm not talking about random stories you might share over dinner, but rather your *life* story—the one you tell yourself every moment of every day. There's power in story. How? Let's take a look.

Our Stories Shape Us

John chapter 4 contains many stories, all taking place at the same time. A story of geography and the division of people. Another story encompassing history, the present, and the future. Stories both

natural and supernatural, religious and theological. Stories of racism, gender, and politics. And centrally interwoven throughout all of these is a story of a conversation between a man and a woman. On the surface these two individuals are very different, but something beautiful is unfolding, involving more than can be observed by onlookers.

The story begins with Jesus sitting at Jacob's well, outside a Samaritan village. It's high, shadowless noon. Jesus is hot, road weary, and thirsty, and He has nothing with which to draw water. So He waits.

He hears footsteps, hurried and hesitant. He looks up, then down, then does a double take at the woman preparing to draw water. She is used to being stared at by men; she's beautiful—she has always looked ten years younger than her age—she knows it . . . and she doesn't care. Any illusions she used to believe have now been shattered. She has enjoyed the glamorous life, been wined and dined by well-to-do men, heard her share of empty promises, and reached out to the men she thought would bring her happiness. On closer examination, Jesus sees cynicism in her eyes, along with a sadness revealing that the best of her days are now behind her. She expects nothing more from life than what it gives her now. Her stories—they are many, all marred by failure—have shaped the life she now lives.

Our stories tell us who we are. They teach us about the world in which we live and how that world works. Patterns that

are repeated over and over in our young experience become the plotlines for the decades that follow. Messages that we hear—or that we interpret from what we hear—become the infallible maxims in which we place our faith. Our stories powerfully determine who we become and how we value ourselves.

We often trade away the true story for tales others have told us, stories that we believe simply because they're familiar, even if they're painful, even when they've grown stale. We easily buy the stories we grew up believing, the ones that made false promises about what would bring us love. When we live a story we were never meant to live, we find ourselves stuck emotionally, spiritually—even physically. We feel powerless to make any changes, so we cling even more to the old story as our excuse for not moving forward.

The simple truth? You are who you are because of the story you have believed about yourself. If you are tired of the way things are and you want to begin a new story, you must be willing to break out of the old one.

Our Stories Shelter Us

She has learned the hard way that everything comes with a price tag. Maybe she has given every man to whom she has joined herself the benefit of the doubt, always finding a way to blame herself. Stories have a way of helping us hide from others and from ourselves.

She shows up at the well at the time of day when no one else would be there. Maybe she doesn't want to hear the whispers of other women gossiping among

themselves about her. Maybe she doesn't want to be reminded of her past behavior, of those five failed relationships. She manages life by trying not to let loneliness get the best of her. She tries not to look at the consequences of her choices. But choices have a way of catching up to us, and somebody has to pay. The mistakes of this beautiful woman by the well have accumulated. She pays the price for them every day.

We use stories to inoculate us from pain we've experienced, to create something beautiful from the difficult and traumatic events of our lives, to explain the moments when the most important people of our lives would not or could not meet our need to be loved. Whether it's a huge tragedy like losing a parent or suffering abuse, or something less significant, we just don't want to hurt, so we build a story for shelter. Some people assume that experiencing pain is a sign that something is wrong, so they do whatever they can to avoid feeling more pain—and by extension they attempt to prevent the “something wrong”—not realizing the pain is a sign that the story is breaking down. Truth is trying to invade.

There are many things people reach for: pills, makeup, shopping, booze. Our society offers a lot of creative options for hiding and anesthetizing pain, trying to convince us that these opiates will make us better and happier. But these quick fixes don't work, because they are external, temporal solutions to an internal and eternal problem. “There is a way which seems right to a man,” wrote wise Solomon, “but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

Hiding under a story is a means of avoiding pain without confronting the problem. Although we manage to numb the ache, we also miss the opportunity to be free. As long as we sit in the shelter of our old stories, those stories will feed us a steady diet of lies about why we are or are not lovable or acceptable. They will craft false scenarios pointing the finger of blame for our pain.

Our Stories Speak to Us

Over the years, our minds have a way of condensing our stories down to pithy slogans that play over and over in our thoughts. This unnamed woman at the well has lived five stories, each with a different man, and all those stories have been reduced to one line: “Shame on you; you’ve failed at love.” This theme has taken on its own voice, speaking constantly to her, forcing her to live and relive her loss and regret.

Jesus sees her and speaks to her. She is used to watching men nervously fumble around for the right words to gain her attention. Not so with Jesus. He’s completely at ease, unfazed by her beauty. He speaks to her comfortably, as though to a friend on the same social stratum. Jesus speaks first. He doesn’t try using any worn-out pickup lines, like, “I don’t think I’ve seen you at this well before.” Instead He asks her for water. By asking her for a favor, He is putting her at ease. He knows from the start that she has chosen her timing in order to avoid people. He looks past all the

obstacles. Race, religion, reputation. Jesus never lets differences make a difference.

She questions how a Jewish man can risk talking to a Samaritan woman, asking her for water, putting Himself at the mercy of a foreign woman. Rather than explain to her that He doesn't care about their ethnic or religious differences, He says if only she knew who is asking her for a drink, she would ask and He would give her living water. Jesus is trying to startle her out of her trance—the mind-numbing, hope-stealing, repetitious buzzing voice of her past stories—to get beneath the surface facade by making her think.

Something inside tells her that Jesus isn't talking about water drawn with a bucket. A new voice has interrupted the old voice, and she is beginning to be stirred.

“Living water? What do you mean?”

This woman knows men and their ways; this is no pickup line. Her soul begins to open. She realizes that while she has been talking about water drawn from a well, this Jewish teacher is speaking of “water” from God.

Although our defining stories happened long ago, we still hear them in our thoughts, echoing back and forth, down through the haunted halls of our experience. We feel the shock waves of these past stories in our present relationships; we experience the plotlines in our current situations. Often today's conflicts are driven by our stories from an era long past.

If you want to become aware of the influence of your old story, here's a good place to start: Think about the last twenty-four hours. The conversation you had with your boss, your spouse, your sibling, or even yourself. Think about something you did that made you feel terrible about yourself. Was there a moment when your emotions were off the chart, when you flipped out or melted down? Have the tension and conflict inside you escalated and spilled out onto those around you? Have you heard yourself shouting, silently or aloud, "What's wrong with everybody?"

These are all indications that you were playing an old story. Whether you thought about it in that moment or not, your story was speaking to you.

It's important to remember that your story will repeat itself. It will come in different forms—through varied characters and settings—but what you feel and how you react are the same. Even after all these years, your old story is re-created, resurfaced, retold.

Our Stories Can Be Switched

The woman realizes how thirsty she has always been. She has been thirsty for something that neither men, nor money, nor sex could ever give. Jesus is way ahead of her. From the moment she walked up to the well, Jesus has known how desperately she has searched for someone or something to satisfy her. She has thirsted for a better life, for a new start, for a fuller way of living.

She has been drinking polluted water.

“Okay, I’d like some of this water you’re advertising.”

“Wonderful,” replies Jesus. “Bring your husband, and we’ll all talk about it.”

Busted. “I . . . I don’t have a husband.” She can’t look Him in the eye.

“That’s right. And you’re not married to the man you’re living with now.”

Her heart skips a beat. “How . . . oh, I see, you must be a prophet!” A seer who knows her whole life history. Suddenly her secrets are exposed. This is getting too close.

But her thirst for authentic life won’t let her simply walk away. She can’t bear another day with an empty heart. Even though this man knows her inside out, she feels no judgment or condemnation in His presence. Maybe He could show her the way out of the maze of her old stories.

Problem: She and God have not been on speaking terms for a while. Of course, she still knows how to talk religion. Religion has had its benefits in her life, allowing her to cover her true condition with a layer of ritual, setting up buffers that have kept others at a distance. If religion is what the Jewish teacher wants, she can accommodate. She searches her memory and comes up with one of the perennial hot topics: “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews say the Jerusalem temple is the only place of true worship.”

But Jesus recognizes the ploy for what it is—her old story’s last effort to maintain control by creating a smoke screen, a distraction from the woman’s deepest needs. Gently He engages her, continuing to bring her back to her need for the new story that God can give her through His Spirit—the new life for which she had given up all hope.

Finally she acknowledges, “I know that Messiah is coming.”

And Jesus, gaze of love unwavering, begins her new story: “I who speak to you am He.”

She finds herself suddenly awake. The change for which she has longed is no longer a distant hope but now a present reality. In that moment she closes the book on her stories of shame, regret, and loss, and she turns the page to a story of new life. Her secrets lose their power; the honesty is refreshing, airing her soul. Where she has always before lived in uncertainty and doubt, she finds herself now unflinchingly confident.

She can’t keep it in. She has to tell someone! Forgetting her original errand, leaving her water pot behind, she sprints for the town. “You all know me, what I’ve been all my life. But I’ve met the Messiah, and look at me now!”

It’s never too late to start your new story.

What story is keeping you from liking yourself? Keeping you from loving others? What’s robbing you of peace, contentment, and freedom? Keeping you from enjoying the people

in your life and receiving your life as a gift? As you find the answer to these questions, you'll run into good news: *You are capable of change.*

It's never too late to switch your story.

When we decide to move beyond our old, self-destructive, self-limiting stories and switch to God's eternal story, we find who we *really* are. We become strong and rooted. We become more complete, no longer defined merely by pain and loss. Yes, pain is still in our lives, but we are no longer dominated by it, able instead to experience the joy of God, to connect to His presence, to enjoy real intimacy. A new story brings strength, courage, power, and freedom to live the gift of life God has given us. Paul described it best when he wrote, "We are afflicted . . . but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

With a new story, we leave behind our familiar facade and are made real. Real enough to face the disappointment of being defeated. Real enough to face the uncertainties of life without becoming disillusioned. Real enough to face the good, the bad, and everything else without losing hope along the way.

Switching stories is not just a matter of telling ourselves a positive statement. It's an opportunity to live in a whole new reality—God's true reality.

Our Stories Are for Sharing

Before meeting Jesus, her story was one of broken dreams and loss—a story that would leave any

listener depressed. But now she has a new story to share: “Is this not the Christ?”

She presents a new perspective, a new way of thinking. Her past serves now only as a springboard to the glorious present and future. One might expect her to return to the town and present a factual case—evidence of Jesus’ wisdom and messiahship. Instead she returns to share her story. Like other followers of Jesus, she speaks of what she has seen and heard. She believes, therefore she speaks. Transformed and purified, this woman shares her story, and the people of the city journey out to see and hear Jesus for themselves. She has become a spiritual signpost, showing others the way to find the Messiah.

From the start, Jesus knows that if He wishes, He can walk right into the Samaritan village and start preaching. But He chooses to wait outside the village, there to change the story of one nameless woman, who then runs to tell other nameless Samaritans. Because of her story they come and see and hear and touch Jesus for themselves, and over the next two days an undisclosed number come to faith in Jesus as Messiah. Scripture says they are “many.”

Jesus could have introduced Himself, but He chose instead to set a life on fire and let others be drawn to its light. Because the woman shared her story, the good news spread beyond the boundaries of Judaism long before the time of the apostles, and the early church reached out from Jerusalem. Jesus

Himself—through a nameless woman—opened the doors of salvation to the rest of the world.

Because she shared.

In any given city, there are thousands of stories assembled, each different, yet all the same—everyone thirsty for something more. So many people drawing from wells that cannot quench the heart's thirst. For so many it would only take one person to share the way to the living water.

Stories aren't just the relaying of facts. They're not just words. They come through the eyes, facial expressions, posture, tone of voice, and energy. The story is told and retold in the streets, in cubicles, in break rooms, in schools, homes, and churches. And beside wells. And every time a truly new story is told, you'll find Jesus the Messiah at the center of it—the Savior, the God who loves the brokenhearted.

In fact, I'd like to offer you an opportunity to share your life verse story. When you've discovered your life verse, please visit YourLifeVerse.org and tell me how it happened and how the Lord has used your verse in your life.

Old becomes new. Lost is found. Hurts are healed. Not by the sharing of an idea, but by the power of the gospel, conveyed through someone's personal experience of faith in Jesus. Now that's a story worth sharing.

Our Stories Have a Start

Even now that she has met the Messiah and committed her life to Him, her past sometimes haunts her. Those words of Jesus still sting: “Go call

your husband.” Like a poker taken from the flames, they can still sear her heart when the memory catches her off guard. He laid bare her personal life—all the stories, all the unhappy endings. She’d never planned for so much domestic disorder. Her thoughts race back to the young boy whose bride she’d first become. The increasing distance, the fights, the separation, the affairs.

But in spite of the fresh flood of pain, she is grateful that Jesus surfaced her not-so-hidden history. Like a doctor draining a festering wound, He has begun the healing process by identifying the central problem. As though He were saying, “If you want a new story, here’s where you have to start.”

And so her shame has turned into a shout: “Come and see the man who told me everything.” The facts of her past life are the same. But now they are bathed in the cleansing light of a brand-new story.

Just as the Samaritan woman could now tell a new story with a new opening line, so it is with us. The facts of our pasts don’t just disappear; we’ve all lived the lives we’ve lived, and neither we nor God slip into a state of denial over what’s happened. Instead the eternal words of Jesus begin to fill the pages of our stories. His words change our perspective and purpose. You need a new opening line—one that gives the old facts a new theme.

Every story starts somewhere. Stories have opening lines, like “Once upon a time.” Opening lines set the tone for what

is to follow. So during this journey of discovery, think of your life verse as the opening line to your new story. Your old story began with an opening line written by others. But God is the author of your life verse, and the rest of your new story.

- > *How do you see yourself in the story of the woman at the well?*

- > *When you share your story, does it affect your listeners positively or negatively?*

- > *What aspects of your story have not turned out as you hoped?*

- > *Have you ever surprised yourself by saying or doing things you thought you never would? Please explain.*

- > *At this moment write your opening line of your story.*