

THEOLOGY OF LIFE EXPERIENCES

Seeing what God has brought you through points to what He's called you to.

LESSON

Clarity House says in their Handcrafted Curriculum: Everyone has a story. But, while **everyone has experienced their life story, few have interpreted it**. Growing a life of impact is to interpret the things you have experienced.

Interpreting your life experience helps you step out of broken cycles of behavior and repeat positive cycles of success. It can also help you identify and name your passions. Both the hard times and the high points of your life form your passion in significant ways. High Points grow your confidence. Hard Times deepen your conviction.

Illustration: Digging through the Pieces

When archaeologists uncover an ancient city, they don't just find perfectly preserved buildings and complete stories. Instead, they find fragments - a broken pot here, a coin there, the corner of a building foundation. Their job isn't just to discover these pieces, but to understand what they mean together. Why was this pot in this location? What does the depth of this foundation tell us about what stood here? Each fragment holds meaning, but the real story emerges when they connect the pieces.

Your life story is similar. You have moments - some broken, some beautiful - scattered throughout your past. Today, we're going to be spiritual archaeologists. We're not just going to list events that happened to us; we're going to uncover what these moments mean together. Like archaeologists, we'll examine each piece carefully, understand its context, and most importantly, see how God has been weaving these fragments into a larger story of purpose.

Seeing Your LIFE STORY

1. God can use past heartache to instill lifelong values.

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."* Notice, it doesn't say all things are good, it says "in all things God works good." When you look at your Life, not everything was good, but God was working in everything, even in the bad things. God never wastes an experience even the bad experiences you brought on yourself. God never wastes a hurt.

Remember Solomon. He was given a genie-in-a-bottle moment. What did he ask for? He asked for wisdom. Why? In 1 Kings 3:7-12, he was the king who built the temple in Jerusalem, he was called the wisest man who ever lived. Do you remember who his mom was? Bathsheba. Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba. What must he have learned growing up hearing the stories about his dad and mom, and how he was conceived? Do you think that contributed to his desire to ask for wisdom? Maybe he remembered his past heartache and it contributed to a lifelong value of wisdom.

2. God can use frightening life events to advance his cause.

Think of Joseph. We all know the ending of his story. Remember, he was sold into slavery by his brothers after being almost killed by them. In the end they are groveling at his feet, and he finally saves them from famine. In the end forgives his brothers, and says the famous line in Genesis 50:20, *“you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good... So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.”*

Where did he learn about familial forgiveness? If you go back to Genesis 33, Joseph experienced a very frightening event. A confrontation between Jacob his father and Esau, Jacob's brother. Jacob was the heel-grabber, the one who stole the blessing. This led to an incredible family rift between brothers that still has echoes today. The land was divided, the brothers went their separate ways for many years. One day Jacob here's that Esau is returning and he's coming with 400 men. Jacob prepared for slaughter. He arranged his children and wives from least favorite to favorite in the back. Rachel and Joseph were at the back of the line. Imagine seeing Esau cresting the horizon with his 400 men. Put yourself in Joseph's shoes, what emotions are you feeling?

Look what happens in Genesis 33:4, what started as a confrontation descended into an embrace. *But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.* Where did Joseph learn about forgiving a brother? He saw it first-hand during a frightening experience from his childhood.

3. God can teach us lessons when we're young that will serve us through old age.

Think of Samuel, the great leader in Israel who had the wonderful privilege of anointing the next king. Samuel went on quite a campaign to find the king. Several candidates were offered forth who completely looked the part. But God kept prompting Samuel, *“Not him, not him, not him.”* Then we get this famous passage, *man looks at outward appearance ... but God looks at the heart.* So Samuel responded to God's voice and named a somewhat unlikely candidate to be king, young David (1 Sam 16).

How was Samuel so in tune with the voice of God? We remember Samuel when he was a little boy. He grew up in the temple with a priest named Eli. The story is in 1 Samuel 3. What did Samuel learn from that experience that served him for the rest of his life? *Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore, Eli said to*

Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." Then the Lord said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel..." 1 Samuel 3:8-11

When he was young, Samuel learned to recognize the voice of God, and when he was older that lesson was utilized in one of the most important moments of Israel's history.

Discussion:

What is a value or passion that you have today, that you can trace back to a lesson or experience from when you were young?

Exercise:

In your notes under High Points and Hard Times: brainstorm 10 experiences in your life that have shaped you the most: 5 positive (High Points) and 5 negative or difficult (Hard Times).

4. God can use our experiences to help others in the same boat.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, "God wonderfully comforts and strengthens us in our hardships and trials." And why does he do this? So that when others are troubled, needing our sympathy and encouragement, we can pass on to them the same help and comfort God has given us!"

Who can relate better to someone who's had an alcohol problem than someone else who overcame alcoholism. Who better to walk with someone through a painful divorce than another person who has been through it. Or the death of a spouse, etc. God doesn't cause these evils but one of the ways he redeems them is to allow us to help others through the things we ourselves have been through.

Exercise:

Now narrow the list of 10 to the 5 most important moments of your life, these are Hinge Points. For each one identify the lessons you learned, the wisdom you gained, or what you came to value most because of that experience.

For example, I had a career-ending shoulder injury in college. It devastated me. I had to quit both the football team and the track team. It was a major low. But in the process, God used it to help me realize that sports had become my god. My identity and my purpose were tied up in something that couldn't support my whole life. I learned dependency on God and it is also the moment that opened the door for ministry for me. That sports injury changed the whole trajectory of my life.

5. God can use our life experiences to tell his gospel story.

In Philippians 1:12, Paul is writing from jail. He says these words, *Now, I want you to know, brothers, what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*" Then he gives two examples of how his imprisonment has served this end.

He says there had been a revival among the imperial guard. These are the poor soldiers who were chained to Paul in his house arrest day after day. Can you imagine how much gospel these chaps heard? No wonder there was revival among the Imperial guard.

The other thing Paul mentions is "preachers" who are taking advantage of his imprisonment. Obviously there were some ministers who were propping up their own ministries and fueling their popularity by envy and rivalry with Paul. It was a "Rise and Fall of Mars Hill" situation where they were gaining popularity by speaking out against Paul's "downfall." Paul sees it differently. He says that whether in pretense or truth (ie. Even if their motivation is screwed up), Christ is being proclaimed and that's all that matters.

There is a way we can view our lives that consistently asks, "are the things happening to me advancing the gospel?"

LAB

Mining Your LIFE STORY

| 5 HIGH POINTS (Moments of great success, pride, or joy) | 5 HARD TIMES (Moments of failure, loss, or grief) |
|---|---|
| 1. | 1. |
| 2. | 2. |
| 3. | 3. |
| 4. | 4. |
| 5. | 5. |

| TOP 5 HINGE MOMENTS (Where your life made a lasting shift) | HINGE MOMENTS INSIGHTS (What heroes, lies, or lessons emerged?) |
|--|---|
| 1. | 1. |
| 2. | 2. |
| 3. | 3. |
| 4. | 4. |
| 5. | 5. |

LIFE

Sharing Your LIFE STORY

1. Choose one of your Hinge Moment insights and share it with your partner.

- Which lessons or values did you gain that continue to influence your decisions, relationships, or ministry?
- Where did you see God's fingerprints most clearly?

2. What part of your story might God be inviting you to share for someone else's benefit?

- Is there a particular struggle or trial you've experienced that could provide comfort to someone facing the same challenge?
- How might you intentionally use your story to point others to the hope and goodness of God—even if the story itself involved pain?