

# STORY

The Art of  
Learning From  
Your Past

JIM PIPER





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## *Dedication*

**M**y most important story can't be told without my family, so I've dedicated this work to them. Each and every one has been used by God to shape me and help me see the majestic gift of life. I especially mention my seven grandchildren, the next generation.

James William Piper, IV  
Jaxson James Piper  
Roxanne Celeste Piper  
Macy Grace Martinez  
Major Gregory Martinez  
Reagan Ann Piper  
Maverick Grayson Martinez

Each of these souls have added invaluable meaning and significance to my life. Their presence inspires me to be better. To love deeper and reach higher. To each, I have assigned nicknames which are expressions of my affection. I can't imagine my life without them. I pray God's grace and blessings on each of them to overcome obstacles, to have faith believing they are loved, and to have courage to live out their days with purpose. To be chasers after God while leaving no small ripple upon this planet. To co-author with God their unique stories.



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## *Introduction*

**A**ccording to Christian Scripture, your life is meaningful and significant. You have intrinsic value. It is also unique. Your life is a story made up of many stories. It is a mosaic, beautiful in the eyes of the discerning.

Your stories include a variety of people. Some you barely remember and others who made a unique impression on your soul. Some of these people belong to you by choice and others are inescapable. In a sense, the living narrative of your life is bigger than you.

Your story is not your own. It belongs in part to others. It belongs to God. It animates your existence and radiates beyond your physical boundaries. Your story is an eternal impression upon creation.

Over the last four decades, I have made it my business to notice and learn from stories. While working as a young business banker, my eyes were open to creativity, problem solving, wisdom, finance, and greed. As a pastor, I'm introduced to the personal struggles of the human condition causing me to dive deeper in search for truth beyond the platitudes of religion and positive thinking. As a coach and consultant, I have seen the power of faith-centric leaders in partnership with God. And as host of *The Today Counts Show*, a life and leadership podcast, all I do is learn!

## **WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT**

The purpose of this book is to encourage you. To remind you of your value and the importance of your stories. Past, present, and future. To inspire you to co-author your life's narrative alongside your creator and the people in your life. To allow reflection and application to shape your character and your leadership.

To do this, we will consider stories from childhood, stories where certain people have made significant impressions upon us, and the implications all of these can have on our development as people and leaders. The first section of this book looks back in time to appreciate the past—the good, bad, and ugly. To realize the things behind us are useful for the present and the future. This helps you understand, in part, who you are today. It allows you to evaluate and decide what is good or bad and what you will choose to do moving forward.

Who are the people in your story? The second section of this book will remind you how powerful relationships are to your life and story. Your role in them. What they have taught you. What they can teach you. How they can hurt you and how they can help you. This section should also help you see the power of your presence in the lives of others.

Why does it matter? Articulating your story and the impact others have had in your story exponentially improves your leadership. When you examine



your story, appreciate and see it with new eyes, you become a better leader. You are more self-aware. You lead yourself more effectively. You relate to others more intentionally. And as a result, you become a better person and a better leader. When that happens, everyone benefits.

## **WHO THIS BOOK IS WRITTEN FOR**

This book is for the believer. For those who believe their life counts. For those who believe or want to believe what is right, good, and helpful. It is for those who desire to live a positive, purposeful, and courageous life. For those who desire to be at peace within themselves. And it's for those who strive to align their attitudes and actions to their central beliefs. It's for those who desire to create a worldview founded on ancient wisdom, tempered by experience, and fueled with purpose.

This book is for the person who desires healthy and productive relationships. For those who want to be a blessing. For those who want to belong, to know and be known. For those who want to be an example for others. For those who are willing to take responsibility.

This book is for the leader. For the person who desires to steward their opportunities to better the lives of others. For the listener. The learner. For those who see themselves as a servant to those they lead. It's for the person who actually believes they can make a difference.

## Story

This book is not for the thin-skinned who are easily offended. Not for the one who cries foul at every experience of injustice. It's not for the thick-skulled who do not have an open mind. Not for the know-it-all. It is for the reasonable, the curious, the idealist, and the rational. It's for most of us but not all of us.

I've done my best to apply sound theology, logic, empathy, and experience to this work. I borrow many stories from my own life and the lives of others for illustrative purposes, many you will relate to and appreciate. It is my prayer and desire that you will be encouraged as you align your life, relationships, and leadership to what is true, causing all of Heaven to stand and take notice of your story.

**PART I**

**CHILDHOOD STORIES  
THAT SHAPE US**



“

“God is big enough  
to be small enough to care  
about you.”

—Jim Piper, Jr.

”

“

“There is no greater agony  
than bearing an untold story  
inside you.”

—Maya Angelou

”

## *The Power of Your Story*

I went to church camp on occasion. Some of my best memories come from around the campfire. There always seemed to be a good story teller who would take center stage and command the attention of us all. The characters within the story always resembled those gathered around the fire. Dark as dark can be with stars in the sky, the master storyteller swept us away into another place and time. Always filled with mystery and danger, they somehow ended in relief laced with a life-lesson and warning.

As I write this first chapter, we are only a few days away from my grandkids coming to visit. We will have the outdoor fireplace going, the smores roasting, and yes, a good story from grandpa. Stories are powerful. They are easier to remember than concepts, principles, or statistics. They engage the listener, evoke emotion, inspiration, and action. A well written story causes the reader to escape their current reality and come alive within the pages of the narrative. Stories persuade and teach. They have the power to pass down virtues and traditions.

All of life is a story. We watch stories called movies and shows. We watch and experience the stories of our children as they grow up. We are a living story. Every hour, every day, we are making stories, watching

them, and living in them. Our stories are shaping us. Not just the experiences of our lives but the people within our stories. The witnesses. The friends and the foes. The heroes and villains. The betrayers and the beloved. All are the cast of characters in our story.

Your life is a series of stories. It is made up of decades and seasons. Hopes and dreams. Victories and defeats. Some hours feel like a year and some years fly by like an hour. And as I said in the introduction, your story is a mosaic. A masterpiece. Your story has power.

Every story has ups and downs. Significant points of highs and lows. Imagine watching a movie or reading a book without drama. Without loss or difficulty. Without courage or victory. It would be boring, unrealistic, and an absolute waste of time.

In the movies, the characters often make mistakes. Big ones! Some recover from them and some don't. We watch with great interest because we imagine being in the same situation. Why? Because we have. What makes a movie really good is when it mirrors reality. When it portrays the truth. When it identifies with our experiences. Especially when it inspires us to make a comeback. To fight back. To win.

We don't like stories that seem fake. That leaves out failures, disappointments, tragedies, and mistakes. We have a need to feel those. To identify with them. To acknowledge that they exist. That's why we love movies based upon true events. We need to know that we are not alone. Bad things happen to all of us yet we



get through them while searching for reason, purpose, and hope for a new day.

You rewind your stories. You tell yourself about the good times but you prefer to forget the bad ones. You like to remember the victories but push back the losses. You embrace your moments of brilliance while beating yourself up for the mistakes. But to get power from your stories, you must squeeze out the good and the bad. The bad teaches you as much or perhaps even more than the good.

As you read this book, my prayer is that you will come to deeply appreciate your story. To embrace it. To reframe it and align it to truth by faith. Your story is being created through your partnership with God. Reflect upon the individual stories and seasons of your life. The good, bad, and ugly. In doing so, you will learn. You will digest acceptance, meaning, and wisdom. You will be able to see how God transforms any story into a masterpiece. Your story is a miracle in the making. If you're willing to see it.