

## TEN LIFE NARRATIVE EXERCISES

The **FIRST** exercise is put forward by Dr Timothy Wilson, in his book *Redirect*. According to his research, he finds this writing exercise has more immediate and long-term positive effects than many other kinds of therapeutic interventions. For four consecutive days, write about a single event in your life that's caused consistent struggle or suffering. At each sitting, write for fifteen minutes. That's it. This exercise is based on the finding that small edits can generate lasting change, and that a significant source of suffering results from an incoherent, or insufficient personal narrative.

A **SECOND** exercise also suggests writing a full narrative about a painful or plaguing event, but writing about it once, and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person (i.e. she, he, it). This exercise has been shown to have both immediate and longer terms positive effects.

A **THIRD** and similar exercise is the "step-back-and-ask-why" Story. Again, writing about a difficult life event or experience, do now simply *recount* it, but *re-construct* it. Write the analysis of *what* you see when you watch the event replay in your mind, *why* it happened, and *why* you felt or reacted the way you did.

A **FOURTH** exercise is called *future framing*, or the "Best Possible Self Exercise," and it's particularly helpful when feeling lost and aimless. Imagine where you would ideally be at some place in the future – 5, 10, 15 years from now – then write the story of how you got there.

A **FIFTH** exercise that also assists with the future tense of your story is writing your ideal eulogy. Write it proud and shamelessly! What would be said about your Ideal Self?

A **SIXTH** exercise that helps with unresolved and unfinished relationships is letter writing. The person or persons need not even be alive. Just write to them your unspoken thoughts and feelings. You can write to them as the person you now are, or as you were at other times in life (e.g. as a child, as you were when a certain event transpired, as you were during a previous season of life, etc). You may also find it beneficial to write the letter in the hand that you are not. If you are right-handed, try writing it with your left. And vice versa. Seal it up and keep it, or put it over a lit match when finished.

A **SEVENTH** exercise combines letter writing with the Life Chapters previously drafted. This one could also be shared with a close partner. For each of the six to eight Chapters from your Life Story, write a letter to at least one person in each Chapter.

An **EIGHTH** writing exercise is also letter writing. For this exercise, as the person you are now, write a letter to yourself, to who you were, either (1) as you were when beginning childhood, or (2) as you were when beginning adolescence. Share with your younger Self the wisdom they'll need to navigate their time in life with grace and meaning, how to handle disappointments and pain, and/or where to seek joy.

A **NINTH** off-the-wall exercise offered by Sam Keen is: Imagine you can travel freely inside your body in the manner of Isaac Asimov's *Voyage*, or *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. Traveling through your body, describe what you see.

A **TENTH** exercise comes from Dan McAdams, and is recommended to try with a partner. Your partner should be someone with whom you feel comfortable and who is capable of taking on an "enthusiastic, affirming, and nonjudgmental" perspective. Each partner should get one to two hours. This can be done in two sessions. Your listener provides the prompts, which asks for eight key events.

- i. Peak experience: The high point in your life story.
- ii. Nadir experience: The lowest point in your life story.
- iii. Turning point: An episode in which you, your life, underwent significant change.
- iv. Earliest memory: One of the earliest memories you have of an event that is complete with setting, scene, characters, feelings and thoughts. This does not have to seem important.
- v. An important childhood memory: Any memory from your childhood, positive or negative, that stands out today.
- vi. An important adolescent memory: Any memory from your teenage years that stands out today.
- vii. An important adult memory: A memory, positive or negative, that stands out from age twenty-one onward.
- viii. Other important memory: One other particular self-defining event from your past.

How do these memories reveal your relationship to the Story Themes of Love and Power, or about what you desire in life? Remember, these are memories that you have subjectively chosen to highlight, while disregarding others. Be curious. Why does a teacher's simple compliment stand out so boldly as very eventful? Why does the death of your father not stand out as the worst thing that ever happened? Why are you alone in most of your key experiences? Why aren't you? Etc.