

Transform Your Present by
Rediscovering God in Your Past

SOUL JOURNEY



BARBARA L. PEACOCK

“*Soul Journey* is a sacred invitation to encounter God’s presence woven through our lives. Dr. Barbara Peacock offers grace, wisdom, and a life-giving guide I wholeheartedly recommend to every reader.”

—**Dr. Michelle Boone-Thornton**,
World Civility Ambassador

“*Soul Journey* is a powerful invitation to deeper spiritual reflection and growth. Barbara Peacock writes with authenticity, wisdom, and a deep care for the reader’s soul. A truly meaningful guide for anyone seeking spiritual renewal.”

—**Rev. Dr. C. Lynn Brinkley**

“Dr. Peacock aptly challenges readers to explore how their lived experiences are a profound site for examining both God’s presence and purposeful formation through reflection, prayer, and writing. This process will undoubtedly provide readers with restoration, direction, and a renewed sense of purpose.”

—**Nadia E. Brown**, professor of government
and chair of Women’s and Gender Studies
Program, Georgetown University

“In *Soul Journey*, Dr. Barbara Peacock offers a deeply personal and theologically rich introduction to the practice of writing one’s spiritual autobiography. Filled with stories and reflective prompts, this easy-to-read book will be of interest to anyone seeking to discern God’s presence in the various dimensions of their life story. A wonderful resource!”

—**E. Trey Clark**, assistant professor of preaching
and spiritual formation, Fuller Theological Seminary

“If you’re seeking to bring your walk with God into sharper focus, this book offers meaningful insight, encouragement, application, and clarity. It’s not just a read—it’s a spiritual invitation.”

—**Dr. Adrienne Garabedian**, assistant vice provost
and program dean, Strayer University

“Biblically rich and filled with pastoral encouragement, deep wisdom, practical exercises, and others’ witness, *Soul Journey* will help you recognize God in your own story as God continues to write the story of your life.”

—**Rev. Bill Haley**, executive director, Coracle

“In *Soul Journey*, Dr. Peacock has given a profound gift to the ongoing adventure of spiritual formation. Her penchant for carefully, powerfully, and slowly mining the rich resources of spiritual tradition for deep formation are evident throughout this work. Given the words of Irenaeus, that the glory of God is a fully alive human being, anyone who walks through this faithful guide will certainly be on the journey of all souls: to become more fully alive in the deep love of God.”

—**Rev. Dr. Preston M. Hill**, assistant professor
of Integrative Theology, Richmond Graduate University

“Dr. Barbara Peacock is on to something! Following Jesus requires story work. In *Soul Journey* Barbara takes readers on an expedition of reflection. If you write your story with her, you’ll have clarity and power to bend your future in the direction of Jesus.”

—**Bishop Todd Hunter**, author of *What Jesus Intended*

“In *Soul Journey*, Dr. Barbara Peacock takes you on a biblically rooted pilgrimage into your past, uncovering the barriers that keep you from deeper spiritual formation today. Barbara has a unique gift of getting to the core. I’ve personally experienced this in my own journey and the lives of our leaders as they wrote their spiritual autobiographies with her guidance. This book is a treasure for anyone longing for true spiritual transformation.”

—**Rob Kelly**, founder and CEO, For Charlotte Network;
cofounder and CEO, City Leaders Collective

“Enter your soul journey prayerfully and reflectively, record the gifts of remembrance, and be sure to say thank you to the One who gives you life. This book is an important reminder.”

—**Stephen A. Macchia**, founder and president,
Leadership Transformations; author of 17 books

“This book will help the blind mindset to see and the captive heart to be free as they journey into their past and, ultimately, find beloved transformation.”

—Debbie Manigat, DMFT, LMFT, spiritual director

“In *Soul Journey*, Dr. Peacock writes with the wisdom and depth that come from years of leading others in spiritual formation and direction. Her voice is trustworthy, her heart is genuine, and her insights invite us to encounter God with fresh clarity and hope.”

—Nicole Massie Martin, author of *Nailing It: Why Successful Leadership Demands Suffering and Surrender*

“It is a pleasure to endorse the latest book from my friend and colleague, Barbara Peacock. *Soul Journey* is a delightful resource for learning how to get the most from writing a personal spiritual autobiography, or, to use Ignatian language, the systematic Examine of a life.”

—Gary W. Moon, MDiv, PhD, founding executive director, Martin Institute, and Dallas Willard Center, Westmont College, and Renovaré; author

“I know of no one who can guide others through their spiritual journey from past to present more deeply than the soul care guru, Barbara Peacock.”

—Tom Phillips, senior advisor,
Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

“With the care of a pastor and skill and wisdom of a seasoned spiritual director, Dr. Peacock invites us to gently look back with grace and move forward with hope that our story is not random but woven into the tapestry of the Holy Spirit.

—Tim Reist, executive director, Space for Your Soul

“*Soul Journey* is steeped in a rich tradition of emotional wellness combined with decades of personal soul care experience. . . . This is a must-read and an ongoing resource to take you deeper in knowing the relationship between self and God.”

—Rev. Dr. J. Elvin Sadler, general secretary-auditor,
The A.M.E. Zion Church; dean of doctoral studies,
United Theological Seminary

“High praise for *Soul Journey*, a wonderful invitation to take a long, loving look at your story where you find traces of the God-story woven throughout, at work shaping and forming you for His purposes. People are hurting and in pain. Storying ourselves through spiritual autobiography unlocks that pain, gives perspective, allows God to come close, and moves us toward healing. Written with clarity and depth, *Soul Journey* calls you into this exploration where you discover that you have always lived in the miracle of His story.”

—Dr. R. Neal Siler, president and founder,
The Healing Place Center for Counseling
and Spiritual Formation, Mechanicsville, Virginia

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BARBARA L. PEACOCK



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Reading an enjoyable book is a treasure. Before enrolling and physically attending a class at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, each student was required to read a book and do a book review. The book that I was assigned to read was about a young lady who was a French Carmelite. The book's title was *The Autobiography of Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Soul*. When I received the assignment, it was challenging to wrap my mind around reading this unappealing book. The good news was I enjoyed my French classes at West Columbus High School (1969–1972) in Cerro Gordo, North Carolina and North Carolina Central University (1972–1976) in Durham, North Carolina.

Reading about a French girl who desired to be a Carmelite was far from the top of my list. Nonetheless, I dove into it, and much to my surprise, it became one of my favorite reads. Thérèse's sister encouraged her to write her journey. Likewise, my professors encouraged all students in the Doctor of Ministry program to write their spiritual autobiography.

Writing your spiritual autobiography was a prerequisite for all students pursuing the Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation for Ministry Leaders at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 2004. Thank you, Dr. David Currie and Dr. Stephen Macchia, for your insight. This assignment

changed how I look at discipleship, Christian education, and spiritual formation. Since I journeyed through the program, it has been on my heart to write a book about the spiritual autobiography. However, it has taken many years for me to have the chance to write about that topic and to pursue publication.

Prior to this book, God called me to write my first book entitled *CALLED to Teach*. (CALLED is an acronym for Commissioned As Leaders, Learners, Educators, and Disciples.) For this book, I was not a solo writer; several Christian educators in the Charlotte area committed to the compilation of this book. My next book was the award-winning book *Soul Care in African American Practice*. This book also has a workbook. After this book, I published two journals. The first was *Psalm 119 Scriptural Journal*, and the second was *He Restores My Soul: Psalm 23:3*. My most recent book is *Spiritual Practices for Soul Care: 40 Ways to Deepen Your Faith*. And now God has blessed me to write, *Soul Journey: Transform Your Present by Rediscovering God in Your Past*. This book is the culmination of over two decades of praying, teaching, writing, publishing, and seeking God for direction.

I have been tremendously blessed by all who have invested in my life with tender soul care. Thank you for your prayers, your support, and your spirit of faith. I am thankful for my family, colleagues, and friends, who have been extremely supportive. I am also thankful for those who felt it could not be done, but *God!*

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I praise God for His sustaining power that enabled me to finish this leg of the journey. To Him be the glory, forever and ever. Amen. Hallelujah.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most classic movies of the past century is *The Wizard of Oz*. In 1939, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer produced this award-winning musical. In this movie based on a children's novel, Judy Garland plays the main character, teenager Dorothy Gale. In the screenplay, Dorothy gets caught up in a whirlwind and lands in an unknown space. Upon her arrival, her utmost dream is to return to her homeland, Kansas. Thus, she embarks upon a journey of twists and turns on the infamous yellow brick road. She meets several strangers who become her friends. What they all have in common is that they are all in need of a miracle. Together their goal is to see the Wizard, the only one who can grant them their heart's desire. Even though Dorothy feels lost on her journey, she never loses hope that she will return home. In this fictional story, the viewers travel with Dorothy and her friends in hopes that their dreams will come true.

The life journey you and I encounter is much like Dorothy's, even though her story is fictional and ours is very much real. We are all traveling on a road of twists and turns. Our prayer is that one day, we too will be blessed with experiencing the dream of our eternal home in a place called heaven. This is our eschatological hope.

Life is filled with ups and downs, highs and lows, and twists and turns. The journey with God is one filled with

adventure and complexities that can often be overwhelming and incomprehensible. Yet, He is our traveling companion.¹ We never journey alone because He is forever with us, whether we acknowledge His presence or not.

Your Spiritual Autobiography

Through reading this book, my prayer is that you will learn to understand your spiritual journey better. Thus, I have committed to writing this book with a workbook in the back to guide you in documenting your story. I will describe some aspects of the spiritual autobiography, but the actual assignment of writing your spiritual autobiography will not occur until the end of the book. Once you write your spiritual autobiography, you will see patterns, a process, and a rhythm in which God has guided your life over the years.

A spiritual autobiography is an in-depth reflection of your journey with God. Writing about this journey calls you to look at the big picture and the intricacies, the exhilarating and the mundane, and the vague and the obvious moments of your finite life. Writing about your journey is not a time to be critical or proud, but a time to allow the pen or the keys on your apparatus to freely flow without inhibitions. This is not the time to become stuck and paralyzed in your reflections. It is a time to open your mind and your heart as you seek to see God's hand on your journey with Him. Sometimes this may seem like a roller-coaster ride, and sometimes it looks like nothing is happening. No matter how high you sense your journey has escalated, or how low the trials and tribulations of life have tried to detour and destroy your very soul, the good news is that God was there. You were never alone.

Implementing this sacred document is designed to equip

you to understand your unique journey. Understanding your journey better will cause a sense of calm within your very soul. Allow the various entities of your story to settle deep down within the crevices of your soul. Seek to embrace and accept the various vicissitudes—the ups and downs, highs and lows, good and bad times—of your journey. Please be mindful that some experiences will be more difficult to understand and accept than others. Prayerfully seek to understand them and to continue desiring to see God throughout your journey.

Understanding your story will help you to understand another person's story better as well. Once you can fully embrace your story, you will develop a sense of love for yourself. As a result, you will better understand your personal journey, and it will be easier for you to love your neighbor (Mark 12:31).

Writing your story is transformative and a life-changing spiritual discipline. The process of reflection, transparency, and discernment makes you a better disciple. Dissecting your journey is discipleship. When we are faithful disciples, we become faithful disciplers. And according to Jesus, making disciples is the greatest commission.²

Your spiritual autobiography is composed of you identifying significant events, people, and places that have influenced you on your soul journey. As you write about areas and benchmarks in your life, seek to discern the movement of God's hand and direction. Ask yourself questions like: Where was He, and what was He doing? During your writing, reflect on peaks and valleys—faith-filled and doubt-filled moments. During these reflective moments, listen to God's voice. What is He saying about all these moments?

In the process of your writing, it is imperative to be honest. Transparency with yourself is essential. This is a time to be willing to look at the good and the difficult parts of your journey. Truly, this is a time of vulnerability. While you are

writing, be prayerful and do not allow the enemy to cause the spirit of guilt or shame to take root. Guilt and shame are enemies that may seek to creep in. Even though they may appear to be the same, they are different. Guilt informs you that you feel bad about yourself. Shame will tell you that *you* are bad. It is imperative not to allow either to dominate or control your thought process. Just keep moving forward in your writing when such thoughts try to dominate you.

Rediscovering God and Yourself

I am passionate about the implementation of this discipline because of the vast difference it makes in the lives of disciples. Far too often, individuals, members, and leaders in the faith community seek to serve in God's kingdom without fully understanding their own personal journey. Too much baggage and trauma have not been identified or dealt with, and thus, leaders are operating in the past. In pain. In deceit. In jealousy. In insecurity. In the false self. In burnout. In depression. In anxiety. Disciples of Christ are often stuck and do not know how to move forward. The lack of understanding ourselves affects how we see ourselves and impacts how we see others. Consequently, it affects how we serve in the faith community and in everyday life.

This book, *Soul Journey: Transform Your Present by Rediscovering God in Your Past*, is designed to get to the heart of the matter, which is connected to your personal and unique soul journey. As a result of your prayerful writing, the emerging wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of your journey will be evident and impactful.

In our current spiritual climate, the relevancy of the church is being reevaluated continuously. During such evaluation, I believe it is vital to implement the writing of one's spiritual autobiography in an effort to develop more

mature disciples. *Soul Journey: Transform Your Present by Rediscovering God in Your Past* guides individuals to adhere to the principles of this ancient discipline with a fresh, innovative, relevant, and transformative approach.

During these critical times in the body of Christ, it is necessary for disciples of the Lord to better understand His ongoing activity in their lives. Many times, people are angry with God, confused about their purpose, and have become stuck and immobilized because of a lack of understanding of their spiritual journey. I pray that this book will be a metamorphic experience that will assist persons, churches, and organizations during the transformative process of connecting the dots of their journey, finding solace for their soul, and becoming more empowered for their journey.

This book is designed to help individuals to more effectively identify their true self and their false self. The true self is the most authentic version of oneself that aligns with God's unique character and gifting. The true self is a godly representation that exudes from the Holy Spirit within. The false self is a pretend self that seeks to camouflage the true self. The false self can play a dominant role in the life of an individual to the extent that the false self thinks it is the true self. By the grace of God, the false self can be demolished so that the true self can emerge, living out the best version of you.

Get Ready for the Deep Journey

For many of us, the act of writing about our personal journey is long overdue. Perhaps you have never considered it simply because no one ever introduced the idea. Or maybe someone did suggest it, but you dismissed it, setting it aside as unnecessary or too difficult to confront. I understand—gazing into the mirror of your life can be a

daunting task. Yet, there is extraordinary value in doing so. Reflecting on the activity of God in your story is one of the most engaging, transformative, and empowering spiritual disciplines you can embrace. Truly, God's grace is sufficient and God ultimately desires that you allow Him to *Transform Your Present by Rediscovering God in Your Past*.

Beloved, you are not alone on this journey. The triune God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—walks with you each and every step of the way. There has never been a moment when the triune God was not there. God's divine presence is your guide, your comfort, and your strength. And I, too, will journey alongside you, offering insights and glimpses into my own spiritual walk—lessons learned, moments treasured, and truths discovered.

You may still find yourself asking, *Why is this deep dive calling me?* That is a profound and worthy question. I believe it is what some might describe as a “Jesus calling” moment. This is a sacred invitation to become a more discerning, faithful, and informed citizen of the kingdom of God. Ultimately, this is all for the glory of God and the fulfillment of the Spirit's purpose and plan for your life.

So take a deep breath. Open your heart, mind, and soul as you prepare to be amazed by what the Spirit will reveal. This is your sacred journey of remembrance, revelation, and renewal. Let's go . . . together.

Chapter 1

THE BEFORE

*Whatever is has already been, and
what will be has been before; and
God will call the past to account.*

Ecclesiastes 3:15

All the triune Godhead was in the beginning; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are the authors of all of creation. The triune Godhead was in the beginning and is ever present. Before the Son of God ever set foot on the earth, He existed. He was before. In the book of Proverbs, the persona of Him as Wisdom is eloquently articulated.

The LORD brought me forth as the first of
his works,

before his deeds of old;

I was formed long ages ago,

at the very beginning, when the world
came to be.

When there were no watery depths, I was
given birth,

when there were no springs overflowing
with water;

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before the mountains were settled in place,
before the hills, I was given birth,
before he made the world or its fields
or any of the dust of the earth.
I was there when he set the heavens in place,
when he marked out the horizon on the
face of the deep,
when he established the clouds above
and fixed securely the fountains of the
deep,
when he gave the sea its boundary
so the waters would not overstep his
command,
and when he marked out the foundations of
the earth.
Then I was constantly at his side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,
rejoicing in his whole world
and delighting in mankind.

(Proverbs 8:22–31)

Theologically, this proverbial text correlates to the personhood of Jesus. He existed before the mountains and hills (Proverbs 8:25). He existed before the heavens were “in place.” The presence of God the Son was in the beginning of time (Genesis 1:2).

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

(Genesis 1:26–27)

The foreshadowing of Jesus, the Savior of the world, is a significant theme throughout the Old Testament. In Genesis 3, the author writes, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (v. 15). Jesus will crush the adversary’s head. Another familiar passage that refers to the foreknowledge of Jesus is found in Isaiah 9: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (v. 6). These are just a few passages that speak to the “before” of Jesus. However, the Scripture references of Jesus in the Old Testament are far too many to share in a limited writing.

The triune God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—created humankind in the image and likeness of God’s triune self. He created humanity in the *imago Dei*. He created humanity with purpose. He appointed and anointed humankind—male and female beings (Genesis 1:27)—to rule, and gave them dominion and authority over creation before He created them (Genesis 1:26).

Yahweh God is Alpha and Omega. He knows the end from the beginning. In His infinite mind, He planned to create everything that was, that is, and that is to come. At the beginning of time, He created everything. In five days, He created the sun, the moon, the stars, the plants, the trees, the fish, the fowl, and the animals. On the sixth day, He decided to make humanity in His image to complete the components of His creation.

Creation and Preformation

In Genesis 2, there is another account of creation: “Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (v. 7).

The inception of the human race began when Yahweh God breathed into a shell of a man. God’s breath and the dormant posture of man connected, and the man took on the form of life. God breathed His *ruach* (his breath of life) into the shell of a man, and man became a living soul; he became a living life, a living human being. Yahweh Elohim, the Creator of humanity, formed man out of the dry, loose dirt of the earth, and thus the inception of human life began!

Yahweh Elohim brought forth, birthed, molded, and manifested His divine desire for humanity into His reality and divine existence. Yahweh Elohim’s innate desire for formation in His divine image was exhibited in the form of His human being. His announcement of this created human was that he was “very good.”

The word *yatsar* is a powerful Hebrew term that reveals God’s intimate and intentional act of creation. Found in passages like Genesis 2:7, *yatsar* is the verb used to describe how God “formed” humanity from the dust of the ground. This is not a distant or mechanical act—it is personal, deliberate, and full of divine care. *Yatsar* is the language of God’s creative craftsmanship.

God’s *yatsar* is not limited to the first breath of life given to Adam; it continues through generations, shaping and forming each of us uniquely. *Yatsar* is active in the formation of my life, in the shaping of your soul, and in the molding of all humanity. We are not mass-produced beings—we are fearfully and wonderfully *yatsar*-ed by the hands of the Creator.

This divine formation declares our identity as bearers of God’s image—humanity that God called “very good.” To embrace the work of *yatsar* is to recognize the sacredness of our becoming. It is to acknowledge that God’s hands are still at work, forming our character, calling, and purpose according to His divine design.

The theme of preformation is found throughout the book of Genesis. In addition, this theme is articulated in the book of the major prophet, Jeremiah. When considering Yahweh Elohim’s preformation, the prophet Jeremiah writes:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying,
“Before I formed you in the womb I knew
you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the
nations.”

“Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

The word of the LORD came to me: “What do you see, Jeremiah?”

“I see the branch of an almond tree,” I replied.

The LORD said to me, “You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.” (Jeremiah 1:4–12)

Awe! How this passage strikes the depths of my soul. God calls the prophet Jeremiah to travel with Him through God’s *kairos* time (God’s divine timing). God poignantly speaks to the prophet about his existence before the actual manifestation of his earthly birth.

In the passage, God speaks to Jeremiah about his before-birth time, God speaks to him about his current time, and God speaks to him about his future time. There is not a time that God is not present nor unaware of Jeremiah. All portions of Jeremiah’s story are spoken of in the pericope¹ of time that is found in Jeremiah 1:4–12. God tells Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). God assures Jeremiah of his current presence in verse 8 when He says, “I am with you,” and in verse 10, “today I appoint you.” God will be with Jeremiah in the future: “You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you . . . for I am with you and will rescue you” (v. 7–8), and in verse 12, “for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.” Throughout the passage, there are ebbs and flows of God’s past, present, and future presence with His prophet.

Likewise, God is with you at all times. He is never absent, even when you do not sense His holy presence. Let us look at some elements of your preformation and God’s presence and *kairos* time in your life.

My dear sister and my dear brother, during your preformation, before your mother and father knew one another,

God knew you. Before you were conceived in the womb of your precious mother, God “set you apart.”² This amazing fact is mind-boggling and beyond the comprehension of our finite minds. However, the truth remains. God preformed. God formed, He made, He designed, He created, He designated, and He consecrated you for His service, even before you were born or named. His preformation had a destination, to your formation, for your performance, all for His glorification.

Mr. James Weldon Johnson, a remarkable poet, penned a phenomenal interpretation of God’s creation in his poem that is entitled “The Creation.”³ Johnson was born in Florida in 1871. He was a national organizer for the NAACP and an author of poetry and nonfiction. Even though he is best known for the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” he is also well-known for his poetry. Take some time to read the beautiful words in “The Creation.” You can find a copy easily online.

In this poem, James Weldon Johnson innately taps into the mind of God as he brilliantly pens God’s heartfelt desire to live in a world with His creation. After God created the fish in the sea, the fowl in the air, and every living thing that creeps upon the face of the earth, he molded humanity in His image (Genesis 1–2).

God was fully complete within His God-self, but He chose to have a relationship with humanity. He had you in mind before anyone else had you on their radar. God intended for you to preexist. Let me say it this way: in the mind of God, you existed before you existed. I don’t know about you, but that is mind-boggling for me. God has information about you and me that no one else on the planet has, not even the adversary. Your parents, public record, and AI are not privy to such heavenly knowledge, and neither are you and I.

The day you came forth into this world, you were named. Whether you were named by parents, grandparents, an auntie, an uncle, a cousin, a neighbor, or a friend, somebody took the time to name you. Most likely, you still go by that name or are called something similar to your birth name.

When you came into this world, God already had a plan in mind for you. Regardless of your personal sense of significance or lack thereof, Yahweh has an assignment just for you. He has something He created you to be and something He created you to do, that only you can be and only you can do. No one else has their name on your assignment. He put you on this earth with something specific in mind. I like to call it “the specificity of your assignment.”

The enemy’s strategic and calculated plan is to distract you from reaching your godly destiny. He desires to abort the manifestation of your full potential. He has deceptive lies to defer, distract, and deter you from fully seeking and accomplishing God’s divine plan and purpose for your life. Such distractions and tactics that the enemy uses may include (but are not limited to):

- You do not know how to speak.
- The TOO’s . . .
 - You are TOO young.
 - You are TOO old.
 - You are TOO sick.
 - You are TOO afraid.
 - You are TOO poor.
 - You are TOO rich.
 - You are TOO forgetful.
 - You are TOO dumb.
- You cannot do it.

- You are not enough.
- You do not need to do that.

Regardless of the adversary's repeated and rehearsed lies, they do not demolish God's truth. His truth reveals that you are predestined, foreseen, seen, called, appointed, and anointed. God is watching to see His Word fulfilled in your life.

It is time to believe, embrace, and live out the prophetic Word of God spoken over you before you were formed in your mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:5). It is time to connect the dots of your spiritual journey from pre-birth to birth to now. This is your preformation, and it has a destination with only your name on it!

Regardless of any concerns or inadequacies you may feel or experience, remember that not only did God set you apart while your mother was carrying you, but God set you apart from the beginning of time—pre-womb and even pre-time. Now that is amazing!

The Knowledge of God

The Message interprets Jeremiah 1:5 this way: "I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you: A prophet to the nations—that's what I had in mind for you." Beloved, God has holy plans that are uniquely designed just for you. Such plans were created and written in the heavens. Yahweh Elohim predestined a unique and divine plan for you in the celestial atmosphere, and nothing can destroy or separate you from His plan, and nothing can separate you from Him.

The apostle Paul says it best, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height

nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39). *No* thing and *no* one can separate you from God.

In Psalm 139, the psalmist “concentrates on one dimension of God’s relation to human beings. ‘You know me’—that is the theme of the whole plea, ‘Know me so that you can lead me.’”⁴ God knows you inside and out and is more than equipped and able to lead and guide you each and every step of the way.

You cannot be separated from God’s infinite and intimate knowledge of and for you. His divine dimensions of knowledge about you existed before you were born and will continue to unfold throughout the journey of your life and into eternity.

As the Spirit uniquely unravels His plan for your life, He will unveil divine clarity. Your desire to know cannot be accelerated. Only in God’s *kairos* time will He reveal His plans for you. There is no need to be anxious or worried. Just knowing that God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence are forever with you births a soul posture of confidential peace in Him. Shalom.

In his *Psalms* commentary, James Luther Mays expounds on this type of peace. He writes:

The psalmist is free for and to God. God is the limit of his existence, yet he is himself a real person to God—accountable, confronted, known. God is free for and to the psalmist. The motions of God’s relation to the psalmist transcends the psalmist’s understanding. What he knows, he knows he does not know. His knowing is an unknowing; its achievement is wonder

and the only certainty is “I am with you”
(vv. 18, 6, 14).⁵

The psalmist is cognizant of the limitations of his personhood and his finite knowledge of himself. Likewise, you and I have limitations of ourselves. Nonetheless, it is incumbent upon us to prayerfully seek the mind and will of God (as much as humanly possible) with a humble desire to better understand His activity in our lives.⁶

Regardless of the knowledge we may obtain, the finiteness of our understanding and complete comprehension of ourselves will remain limited. As mere humans, we will always maintain a sense of unknowing. Yet, our security resides in the fact that God is all-knowing and that He is with us throughout the ups and downs of our limited lives.

Not only is He Immanuel, which means God with us, while we reside on earth, He is Immanuel throughout all time. He was with us in the past, He is with us in the present, and He will be with us throughout eternity.

I am continuously curious about the activity of God in the lives of people. He is present in the lives of people, whether they acknowledge Him or not. There is nowhere that anyone can go that He is not already there. The psalmist makes this very clear in Psalm 139. He was fully aware that wherever he went, God was already there. The psalmist says to Yahweh, “If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (vv. 8–10). There was nowhere the psalmist could arrive where God was not already there.

Allow me to share a story with you to demonstrate that God is always with us and even before us. In 1996, God moved our family of three from Hillsborough, New

Jersey, to Charlotte, North Carolina. Once we settled into our new location, our daughter, Vérnee, started working at a local pizza restaurant. She drove my 1993 red Volvo to work. One day, while she was away at work, our good friend Gloria Potts stopped by to visit us, and she parked her red Volvo in our garage. When Vérnee came home and opened the garage door, she saw a red Volvo. She went into the house and shared the confusion she encountered upon arriving home. She told us that when she saw the red Volvo in the garage, she said to herself, “Am I already here?” We all found the red Volvo story hilarious. I would imagine that Vérnee felt a lot like the psalmist: she felt like what she was experiencing had already happened. In God’s omnipresence, God arrives before us at every point in our lives. Unbeknownst to us, He is always before us and before we arrive. He is the *before*.

God Is Present in Our Journeys

One of my favorite pastimes is watching documentaries on television. I like to learn about people’s lives and see the impact of their past on their present. From December 1, 2024, to January 5, 2025, my husband and I were on vacation in Hilton Head, South Carolina. During this time, I was blessed to enjoy documentaries on the lives of Barack Obama, Mother Teresa, Desi and Lucy, Michael Jackson, and Eddie Murphy. Other documentaries that I have watched over the years include stories on the lives of Elvis Presley, John F. Kennedy, Jackie Onassis, Martin Luther King Jr., Jimmy Carter, Michelle Obama, Tina Turner, Whitney Houston, Quincy Jones, Marilyn Monroe, Donald Trump, Lebron James, Kobe Bryant, Michael Jordan, Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Colin Kaepernick,

Colin Powell, Beyoncé, Alex Murdaugh, Lyle and Erik Menendez, Tiger Woods, Lady Diana, Harry & Meghan, Oprah Winfrey, Mary J. Blige, and more. Each story captured my attention as I sat on the edge of my seat, waiting to see how their past influenced their societal impact and how their lives unrolled. I enjoy watching documentaries, and a good book about a person also gets my full attention. The commonality of all these stories is the unveiling of their unique journeys.

Even though I had limited space while packing for our stay in Hilton Head, I felt the most impactful books I could bring during our stay would be books about the lives of spiritual leaders. Two of the books I brought were *Becoming Dallas Willard* by Gary W. Moon and Saint Augustine's *Confessions*.

The travel, research, and conversations that Gary Moon engaged in to write a biography of Dallas Willard are to be highly commended. In his book, Moon shares the multifaceted complexities of the philosophical spiritual giant, Dallas Willard. As Moon summarizes Willard's tumultuous childhood, he writes:

In the midst of all the childhood pain, however, Dallas met a God he came to believe was the most joyous being in the universe, and nothing bad should ever be spoken or thought of him. Perhaps in part it was the contrast concerning his image of God and that of his father that made him realize God should not be created in the image of one's male parent, unless that parent bore a striking resemblance to the prodigal son's father. Perhaps the painful relationship with his own father motivated him to realize

that we should never “let anyone tell you something bad about God.”⁷

From this paragraph, it is evident that Dallas Willard’s journey with God was not flawless. He had a turbulent childhood, but by the grace of God, Dr. Willard was propelled into ministry to fulfill God’s purpose and plan for his life. God gave him wisdom to see the loving authenticity of the Godhead Father, in spite of the flaws of his earthly father. Experiencing God is His desire for all.

In the list of documentaries above, some of the featured people pressed through hard times to experience the presence of God in their lives, whereas others would never have such an encounter, whether in part or entirely. Whether one recognizes God’s presence or not, He is always omnipresent. He knows what will happen before it happens.

Regardless of how the enemy may try to derail God’s plan for one’s life, God’s hand will prevail. Attacks will come, and attacks will go, but God’s plan will prevail. I do not believe that anyone who leaves this ole earth will be pain free. Dr. Willard’s and the people’s journeys in the stories were no exception.

We all have a before. We have a before that existed in the earth realm, and we have a time that points to the before that existed before this present moment. Today you are in the now, and yet an unknown future is forthcoming. Before you go dashing to what is yet unknown, take time to settle into the now.

There is no way to avoid the before, even before the very moment you are experiencing now, the previous moment was before. There is no way to get around the before. There is always a before. In multiple ways, your spiritual autobiography is consistently your before as you are on your way to the now, which leads to the after.

None of your life, whether before or now, will be perfect. Like Dallas Willard and the people in the documentaries, your life will not be without challenges. Willard had to honestly address the pain of his past and see God amidst the crises of his life. Therefore, as you begin this journey, make up your mind to face your truths even when it hurts. As I have watched numerous documentaries and read several autobiographies and biographies, I have seen how God's presence is constant in His creation. He does not leave His creation without His presence, nor does He shield His humanity from all the challenges of life. We do not live in a perfect, pain-free universe. Nor are we humans perfect.

We all have our inadequacies, similar to the imperfections of the prophet Jeremiah. There are no perfect human beings, and that includes you and me. Only One is perfect, and that is God. Humans are imperfect; thus, we must depend on Him to make it through the tight and inescapable traps and corners of life. Our imperfections call us to make a decision (or not) to completely depend on Him. He already knows our end from the beginning and consistently beckons us to draw nigh to Him for His divine help and support. If you and I desire to live a life dependent upon God, we cannot go through life without His presence. He makes the dots, and He connects the dots; He just desires that we see His activity throughout the course of our lifetime.

As we move forward in the book, at the end of each chapter, I encourage you to take "Selah Moments" before moving on to the next chapter. Be intentional about taking time to exhale. Pause. Reflect. Pray. Write. All the chapters end with Selah Moments that are uniquely designed to better prepare you to write your personal spiritual autobiography.

You may notice that each Selah Moment ends with the

suffix “-ING,” which signifies action. In my book *Spiritual Practices for Soul Care: 40 Ways to Deepen Your Faith*, all the practices also conclude with “-ING.” This was not accidental—it was a deliberate and meaningful choice. The “-ING” not only represents ongoing spiritual activity, but it also serves as an acronym: I Need God. To fully engage in these Selah Moments you and I must recognize our dependence on God. Indeed, we need Him—continually and completely. It is now that we begin!

SELAH MOMENTS

PAUSING—Take a few deep breaths as you pause and think about what you have learned in chapter 1.

REFLECTING—Give yourself ample time to reflect on your preformation. Reflect on how God is speaking directly to your soul, based on your reading of this chapter. What do you sense God saying to you?

PRAYING—Pray about how this chapter may apply specifically to your spiritual journey. Please google “The Creation” by James Weldon Johnson. I encourage you to read this poem twice. Thank God for His creation as you read. Thank Him for creating humanity. Thank Yahweh Elohim for preforming, forming, and creating you.

WRITING—Even though in this chapter there is no need to write, it is a good time to spiritually, mentally, and emotionally prepare your heart and mind to write your spiritual autobiography. Consider writing questions or thoughts about your beginning that you would like to explore.



Special thanks to my family: Vèrnee Peacock Wilkinson (right), Michael Wilkinson (center), Eden, and Eliah (far left).



And of course, my husband, Gilbert.



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DARE TO EXPLORE YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

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Barbara L. Peacock is the award-winning author of *Soul Care in African American Practice* and the founder of Barbara L. Peacock Ministries, through which she offers classes and certifications in spiritual direction for leaders. She has been married to Gilbert for 45 years and resides in Indian Trail, North Carolina.

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