

LESLIE LEYLAND FIELDS

YOUR STORY MATTERS

**FINDING, WRITING,
AND LIVING THE TRUTH
OF YOUR LIFE**

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SEVEN “FEAR NOTS!” OF WRITING YOUR STORY

IN THE BIBLE, whenever God or his messengers showed up, in dazzling brilliance, to issue a task, a call, people fell down in terror. *Who, me?* So many times the divine response was, *Fear not!* Here, then, are the Seven “Fear Nots!” of Writing Your Story.

1. **Fear not! that your story doesn’t matter.** It matters immensely to God, who is the author of your story. As the writer of your story, you’re in charge of making it matter to your readers. Remember, we write not only for ourselves, to discover wisdom, truth, and beauty in the simplest and hardest moments of our lives, but we write for our readers as well, who are also on a faith journey.
2. **Fear not! that you have nothing “new” to contribute to the world.** Listen to Madeleine L’Engle: “My husband is my most ruthless critic. . . . Sometimes he will say, ‘It’s been said better before.’ Of course. It’s all been said better before. If I thought I had to say it better than anybody else, I’d never start. Better or worse is immaterial. The thing is that it has to be said; by me. . . . We each have to say it, to say it our own

way. . . . Good or bad, great or little: that isn't what human creation is about. It is that we have to try; to put it down in pigment, or words, or musical notes, or we die."

3. **Fear not! that you're not a good enough writer to accomplish your goal.** None of us is good enough to finish a project when we start. Some of us aren't even good enough to start! By the time we finish, though, we have become more than good enough. The struggle, the long hours, and the word-wrangling and prayer-wrestling will get you there day by day.
4. **Fear not! that you don't have enough time to write.** Of course you don't. No one does. But if you are serious about this calling and this project, you will find a way to reorder your life: stop watching TV, write while the kids are napping, get up two hours earlier than everyone else, take your manuscript with you on vacation. Yes, it costs you. Nothing of great value is free. Count the cost to everyone. Then, if you're still so moved, make room and carry on.
5. **Fear not! that you won't finish what you start.** The beauty of writing life stories is that every piece you write is a story saved from the Closet of the Forgotten. Don't let guilt or perfectionism steal the joy and wonder of whatever you're able to do.
6. **Fear not! that people will reject you when they hear your story.** I can make no promises about people's responses but know that most of us struggle with the same battles and afflictions. If the sharing of your experience offers meaningful wisdom and hope to others, then write it and tell it. Your courage and authenticity will help others move past masks toward truth-telling and healing.

7. **Fear not! that no one will read your work.** Someone *will* read your work. Maybe a few friends, your family, the ones you really care about; maybe thousands of strangers. No one knows this when they are writing, and it has nothing to do with the work. Just get on with the writing and editing, and trust that your life stories will find the people who need and cherish them the most.

RESOURCES

Selected Spiritual Memoirs

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- Mandelker, Amy, and Elizabeth Powers, eds. *Pilgrim Souls: An Anthology of Spiritual Autobiographies*. New York: Touchstone, 1999.
- Manning, Brennan. *All Is Grace: A Ragamuffin Memoir*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2015.

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- Schwartz, Mimi. *Good Neighbors, Bad Times: Echoes of My Father's German Village*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2009.
- Winner, Lauren. *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*. New York: HarperOne, 2013.
- Zaleski, Philip, ed. *The Best Spiritual Writing*, annual series.

Selected Books on Writing

- Writer's Market* (annual reference guide) by Writer's Digest Books
- Christian Writers' Market Guide* (annual reference guide) by Christian Writers Institute
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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER ONE: YOUR BIGGER STORY

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3. Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 137.
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5. *Fall of*: Matthew 10:29; *wandering of*: Matthew 18:12-14; *strand of*: Luke 21:18.

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2. Exodus 10:2, NKJV.
3. Judges 8:34, RSV.
4. Dan Allender and Don Hudson, "Forgetting to Remember: How We Run from Our Stories," *Mars Hill Review* 8 (Summer 1997): 65.
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7. Ecclesiastes 1:1.

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CHAPTER THREE: YOUR OUTER STORY

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CHAPTER FOUR: YOUR STORIES TOGETHER

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2. Luke 19:40, author’s paraphrase.
3. To learn more, see <https://www.facebook.com/galleytables/>.
4. Romans 12:15, ESV.
5. Psalm 96:3, ESV.
6. 1 Corinthians 14:26, BSB.

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3. Ephesians 4:25, 32.
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CHAPTER EIGHT: YOUR STRUCTURED STORY

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3. Ephesians 1:10.
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8. Leslie Leyland Fields, *Surviving the Island of Grace* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2002), 329–30.

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1. Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 72.
2. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988), 65.
3. Madeleine L’Engle, *A Circle of Quiet* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), Section 1.9.
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6. John Milton, “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent,” <https://poets.org/poem/when-i-consider-how-my-light-is-spent>.

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