River of Life

Brief Description:
River of Life is a visual narrative method that helps you reflect back on periods of your life and perhaps ‘tell the story’ to others. It can be a fun exercise but also helpful in identifying key incidents, influences and issues that not only have a bearing on your past, who you are today, but also a backdrop or framework on what your situation might be like in the future.

Sharing your story with others can often help you see the bigger pattern in your life and encourage you on how God has guided you so far, and will do in the future. It can be a powerful means of encouragement and affirmation of the path, or in this case river, you are on.

The River of Life exercise uses pictures to identify the key points rather than written composition. It doesn’t require expertise in creative art.

Exercise:

Reflect:
Think back over your life and try to identify incidents, periods, experiences and people that have influenced the course of your life or made a real impact on your personal development.

Some examples …..
..... maybe a time of crisis or great joy
..... a time of searching and discovery
..... family issues (good or bad)
..... your spiritual awakening / becoming a Christian
..... people who have impacted your development
..... encounters with God

You might want to think about some of the following questions as you recall your life.

- Who has been of great influence at different times in my life – whether spiritually or personally?
- Recounting incidents of trouble or joy, what impact did they have on your life, your understanding of God, your direction?
- Were there particular times you believed God was speaking to you about the way ahead? When and what did you feel he was saying?
- Were there times when you feel your life was in a time of acceleration or stagnation – when, and can you point to reasons?

Represent:
Consider how you might now represent your life story in the context of a river, with the incidents and experiences identified earlier being included along the way.

You may simply want to do this in an exercise book, or indeed use a large surface like a roll of lining paper. It’s your choice.

The river represents the passage of time and might have different features you feel may illustrate your experiences. Maybe the river might be broad and calm for a while; there might be times when the passage is over rapids and round hazardous rocks;
maybe you think your river is diverted at some stage, travels around bends and doubles back on itself or goes up a creek with a dead end! Use your imagination. You don’t have to be a “Master” in art. Use ‘stick people’, simple boat outlines, trees on the river bank, etc. etc. You could use ‘post it’ notes or cut-out images if it seems easier. That way your tale can be adjusted and expanded.

Here’s an idea to illustrate how a story might unfold, but make it your own.

Re-tell:

Once you’ve completed your ‘masterpiece’, find an opportunity where you are able to tell your story to someone else. Maybe you could tell it to members of your family, although they might know much of your life - but maybe not your insights and reactions to incidents or people’s impact. Possibly you could share it with friends, or even ask if your house group would like to hear your story … and ask you questions about it. It’s a great tool for sharing your testimony, and seeing the way God has impacted your life so far.

Review:

In reviewing your River of Life, what things can you learn?

○ Are there things, incidents or people that motivate you to praise God for that you may not have recognised before? Is that something you should do right now?

○ Are there any people in your story (on your journey) that you might need to contact to thank or share the outcomes, so they can be encouraged, too?

○ Are there things that God has shown or indicated to you that you have yet to see fulfilled? Should you note them, and pray towards them?

○ Are there specific ways God has guided you that have bearing on where you are right now and the decisions you are trying to make? Do you need to act on these?