

What's your story?

By [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

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I carried one book with me across the country on a recent trip, [Phyllis Tickle's *The Shaping of a Life: A Spiritual Landscape*](#).

I stuffed it in the airplane carry-on with the children's coloring books. I read it by cell phone light while the toddler snored next to me. I curled up with it on the hotel bed while the city hummed and honked through another D.C. afternoon. I read it in Michigan where I grew up and Indiana where I went to school. I read it between reunions with family and friends.

And one single chapter haunted me.

Phyllis writes about the Bible story that defined her life, faith, and identity. The one story that she discovered as a young girl, the story that became her variation on a theme, weaving its way through decades of life and work and prayer.

What was my story? I turned this question over and over in my head, wondering whether there was a single Bible story that gave patterns to my life. I envied the unity and clarity of Phyllis' vision of the world, that the story of Moses and the serpent from Exodus could so perfectly and powerfully pull together so many strands of her multiple callings.

But somewhere between the Ohio turnpike and the Indiana toll road, between a baptism and a wedding, between a glinting golden dome and the sparkling river in my parents' backyard, between a heart full of places and people I call home, I decided there wasn't only one story for me.

I come from many places, and I feel called to many places, and maybe it makes sense that I need more than one story. I have three.

The story that captures my sense of calling? [Jacob wrestling with God.](#)

My life's work is full of wrestling. [I notice that I use the verb all the time](#)—to describe how I have dealt with the challenges of parenting, to sum up the struggles I feel as I figure out what my faith calls me to.

Everything I love deeply seems to involves wrestling. Theology's biggest questions and deepest truths. Writing's longing to pin down the elusive into words. Family life's rubbing up against each other, for better or for worse.

I wrestle with God in all these arenas. If I didn't have Jacob's story pressed closed to my mind's heart, I would probably be discouraged or defeated by the hard work this takes.

But this story reminds me over and over that the wrestling itself is holy. A mysterious but real encounter with the divine that left Jacob limping with the wound and the blessing he would never forget.

I imagine I will wrestle my whole life, with my whole life. I believe I come to know something of God through this grappling with what I'm called to be and do.

The story that wraps around my motherhood? [The Visitation](#).

[I have these moments all the time](#). I cannot explain them in any terms except Mary and Elizabeth. On my trip I plopped down in an airplane seat next to a woman who already had her eyes closed and her jacket pulled up to her chin. As a fellow introvert, I respect the signs of those who don't love small talk. I settled in next to my family and let her have her space.

Until I had to pull the screaming toddler onto my lap, disturbing her peace, and then she smiled when I handed him back to my husband with apologies.

Your kids remind me of mine, she offered. I already miss them. She teared up and told me they were nine and seven and she'd never left them for work before. And she was pregnant and feeling wretched, and next thing I knew we were commiserating over the awfulness of morning sickness and laughing at how moms still make grocery lists and holiday plans from their sick beds.

Suddenly I realized it had happened again, as it happened a thousand times before with other parents, often in the strangest of places. **It was our children who brought us together.** The divine sparks of love we held within us that allowed us

to connect across circumstances. [*You're a mom; you know.*](#)

I feel Mary and Elizabeth's delight and wonder and relief and joy every time I stumble into one of these everyday Visitations. I know their story has everything to teach me about what it means to trust, to love, to seek, and to connect. Which is almost everything I am learning about what it means to mother.

The story that challenges my faith? [*Jesus and Peter on the beach.*](#)

I can't stop thinking about this story. I thought about it [*every day I worked at L'Arche*](#) and wondered what it means to serve the least lambs that the world ignored. I remember it every time I read haunting headlines in the news about poverty and suffering. I even think about it [*when I'm spooning food into the baby's mouth.*](#)

[*Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.*](#) A haunting refrain. What am I doing with my life to care for the least? He cannot make it clearer that this is what matters most.

But this startling story confirms my faith, too. It's my favorite resurrection narrative: the quiet calm of the scene at dawn on the beach, the hearty breakfast of fish that Jesus cooks (and eats! not a ghost!) with his friends, the forgiveness he offers to Peter—three times in abundance to forgive and forgive and forgive every denial.

I picture them sitting together on the shore, learning what it means to love and believe. And I am overwhelmed with this encounter with the risen Christ: Eucharist and Reconciliation and Holy Orders. All of it is here. All of it is here for us.

I only pray that my life will hold up against this story, that its contours will be shaped by feeding and tending and serving and loving.

I can only hope this story can be mine, too.

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