

EXCERPT



Dim Sum and Faith *How Our Stories Form Our Soul*

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Drawing from her own rich tapestry of experiences, Jenn Suen Chen helps readers to explore how our personal narratives shape our spiritual journeys.

We Each Have a Story

You and I have a story that began long before we were born. In Psalm 139:15-16, the psalmist writes, “You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed” (NLT). The reality of such truth can feel too much to grasp. For if this is true, then why do we so often still struggle to experience deep worth and meaning in our lives? Reading those verses could even possibly make us feel uncomfortable, to be so seen by God who sometimes might feel distant from and unresponsive to us.

We are all looking to make sense of our lives, to find meaning in the things we do, to feel purposeful even in what might feel ordinary and mundane. These longings grow with time, for as we get older, we may find ourselves more and more dissatisfied with the ways in which we have lived on autopilot. Paying attention to these longings will help our hearts to begin to wake up.

When we are young, we cannot understand the full reality of our family, the dynamics of what makes up family structure and dynamics, our cultural environment, and the various communities we live in. Most of us can only find our way through it. We find ways to adapt to whatever it is that is going on, and we become really good at doing this on our own, even if we know God. We also find ways to numb our pain. God invites us now to begin to untangle those ways and discover and acknowledge his faithful hand that has watched over us for all of our years.

Many cultures believe that our stories are intertwined through the generations; and as an Asian American it is difficult for me to speak of my story without referencing those who have gone before me. Each of us have a migration story, unless you are indigenous to the land which then would include different elements of a migration journey. This journey adds layers of complexity to our family story as the connection to a homeland and a people may feel less and less for generations as they are farther removed.

As a little girl, I heard the stories of my grandparents’ and parents’ generation while I eavesdropped at the table as my aunts and uncles laughed and told stories of their childhood. Their ability to find humor in their telling of the most painful of moments tells me they found strength in being together and resilience grew out of those places. Perhaps humor provided the needed levity to face the difficulties and challenges they endured. Their stories seemed to contain more pain and grief than ease and comfort. I listened to these stories as if they were a fable of sorts, a tale of old and of places far away.

You may be saying to yourself, *well, that’s nice, Jenn, I’m happy you have some fun stories to recall. What’s the point of recounting our stories, anyway?* I will venture to say if we want deep healing, then we must do this work.

We have all told our stories in a thousand ways, whether explicitly or implicitly. We have all believed a narrative about our lives, about who we are, how we are to interact with others, and who God is, and all of it has been deeply informed by our stories. We have been thus shaped. Some of the shaping is good, but many of our stories have left deep wounds that have never been healed.

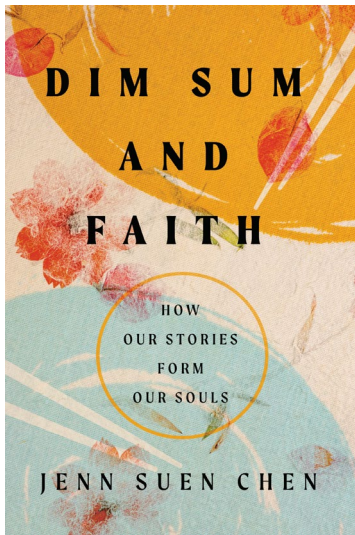


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My heavily fortified, self-reliant heart that emerged from early elementary kept me from truly showing up in relationships until I was able to identify and tell my story in a fuller, honest way. I'm still learning to do that, and God is healing my heart. Healing is one of the reasons why we do this work, and I believe connection is another reason. When we tell our honest, unmasked stories to one another, we find ourselves experiencing authentic connection with others, which also contributes to our healing. We all have questions about our lives, don't we? In addition to healing and connection, telling our stories helps us also make sense of our lives.

There is no right way to dive into our stories, but one way we can begin is by sitting with God and inviting him into this act of remembering. "God, would you remind me of the stories that are important for me to remember?" You will find one or two might stir up in your soul, and as they do, could you take a moment to sit with them? Feel the emotions. Think about the people, the places, the smells, the things you remember. In storywork, it's okay to just let the story be what you remember, because no two people remember things the same way. We recall our childhood stories through the age we experienced them.

We must also remember our stories with God. If you are reading this book, I am trusting you have some kind of relationship with God already. You may have known him your whole life and feel his closeness daily. Some of you may have a newly growing faith and you're wanting to grow in hearing his voice. Or you may have known him but now God feels far away and disconnected from your life. Wherever you find yourself, and whatever you think about God, I want to say to you, God is here with you. He desires for you to know that personally.

—adapted from chapter one, "An Invitation to Look at Our Stories"



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