

Dear friends of Vital Signs Ministries,

August 2025

I had left our guests briefly to put on another pot of coffee. (The incident I describe, by the way, happened many years ago.) We were hosting one of our Christmas parties and the conversations in the living room of our South Omaha townhouse were lively and meaningful. And, as I was performing my task, the college-aged son of another of our guests followed me into the kitchen. “Denny, I gotta’ tell you that I get such a kick out of listening to the stories you tell when you’re with my Dad. And his stories too. You guys have known each other for so long and have been involved in so many things and your stories are so cool and interesting. Even the stories you sometimes slip into your preaching -- I love them too.”

I thanked him for the compliment and probably said the usual things I say when people comment on my storytelling; that is, expressing the debt I owe to my father and uncles who were terrific storytellers, as were several of the men who hung around the Banner Conoco gas station where I worked when a teenager. And I can’t fail to honor also the influence of those hundreds of books I had read as a kid! Keen storytelling had long been an entertaining and useful craft which I admired and hoped to someday practice.

My young friend asked a question or two about that and, as the Mr. Coffee finished its brew, I filled a carafe and started back towards the party. But J----- arrested me with one other sobering statement. “You know, Denny, my friends and I don’t do this at all. I mean, we *never* tell stories like you and Dad do. The closest we come to anything like it is to recall some scene in a movie or describe something that happened in a NFL game. We don’t tell stories about stuff that happens to us, you know, that have us actually *doing anything*. And tonight, listening to you and Dad again, it made me realize that I don’t really have many stories to tell.”

We went back into the living room and, I’m sure, we had a wonderful rest of the evening. Nevertheless, my young friend’s confession left a sad undertone and I ended up thinking about it for several days afterward. I think about it still. J----- was right to admire the storytelling arts. They are a valuable talent. Much more important, though, was his realization that the foundation of interesting, worthwhile stories is an interesting, worthwhile life! Living right. Living involved. Living with thoughtful awareness and judgment. And, as I stressed in last month’s LifeSharer letter, *living intentionally*. That’s what creates stories that are worth telling. Whether those stories are artfully constructed and communicated, whether they are funny or sad, whether they are memorable, surprising, instructive, corrective, stimulating, inspirational, or whatever -- the best storytellers are people who have themselves best lived the stories God has laid before them.

The most obvious moral of the story I tell above, of course, is to beware the power of our “smart” phones, television, other entertainment devices, the Internet, and any other invention that has the power to take us out of the game and set us on the bench. Anything that tempts us (let alone, directs and enables us) to exchange the identity God has given us as a free, moral *actor* in life’s grand dramas for the dull, pacified existence of a mere *spectator* is a bad, bad deal. We must not allow the world to cow us, fool us, dominate us, and consign us to the sidelines only to become gawkers of the lives of others who are more invested and involved. God forbid. We are to keep our lamps burning; be *doers* of the Word; stay in the fight to do justice and enact mercies; occupy until the Master comes back; sow seeds of truth in His vineyard; and live free

from all fetters save the yoke of the Lord Jesus. We can, by the Spirit's empowerment, truly be a part of His exciting, victorious story -- through wisely investing in our own.

And, by so doing, we will have terrific stories to tell!

Now, at this point, I can guess that some of you are skeptical about being much of a storyteller. But let me explore the subject a bit. First of all, what exactly is a story? My old Webster defines *story* as "a narration or recital of a series of facts or incidents." Furthermore, it explains that *story* can be a transitive verb meaning "to tell in historic relation." Your high school English teacher may have dressed up these basic definitions with talk of plot, setting and atmosphere, characters, point of view, conflicts which create dramatic tension, emotion, lessons to be learned, and so on. She might also have described the three basic literary styles: narrative, poetry, and discourse. All three of these, by the way, appear in the Bible which is incredibly rich in stories. Indeed, over 40% of Holy Scripture is stories -- some 6-800 of them!

So yes, God is big on narrative and history, big on poetry and song, big on preaching and prophecy. God is big on story...both in His Scriptural revelation *and in us*. We are the protagonist in the story God "writes" for us. The characters are the people we connect with. The setting is our home, workplace, neighborhood, hospital, church, vacation spot, grocery store, highway, and wherever else we land. The conflict takes place within the battles we wage every day with the flesh, the world, and the devil. The point of view is the providential oversight of the Holy Spirit as He fashions us into the image of Christ. And the plot? The plot is simply the answer to the question, "what happens next?"

Thus, our stories can be as drab as old dishwater or as rich in faith, holiness, compassion, and courage as the Lord desires. That's all up to us. They are, after all, *our stories* which reflect our responses (or lack thereof) to the Spirit's leading. And finally, make no mistake, *your story* is most definitely being read and watched and listened to! Even if it's a lousy story. So don't let it be that. You have the chance of making a real difference in the lives of others -- your spouse, your family, your neighbors, your friends, your enemies, and the divine Audience of One Who is ever ready to applaud and reward you for intentional living for His purposes. Your story matters more to God than you could ever imagine. Furthermore, it is a story which builds to ever greater excitement and love and beauty -- a story that will never, ever, ever end!

But now, keeping in mind that these monthly LifeSharers also serve as newsletters, let me share a few pages from our own "storybook" of this past month.

* We lost (only temporarily) the presence of a dear friend and longtime pro-life champion this month, Linda Aldrich. Her memorial service was a powerful, heartwarming testimony to her very faithful, very vibrant pilgrimage. She adds yet another reason for us to look forward to the heavenly homecoming that awaits all who know Christ as Savior. Vital Signs Ministries was profoundly honored to receive honorariums in Linda's name. Thank you, Ralph; thank you also to their daughters, their grandson, and all those who made donations in Linda's memory.

* In July our “When Swing Was King” schedule expanded to 11 senior facilities a month. They all went “swimmingly well” as did an extra 2 “home showings” that we presented for friends who are dealing with serious illness. July’s “When Swing Was King” outreach was also special in igniting several spiritual conversations with our guests.



* We helped organize and host perhaps the most successful ever in our annual series of block parties on July 4. Over 55 people attended with plenty of great food and very pleasant connections between neighbors.



* July saw a lot of correspondence including several open letters to political leaders, copies of which were posted on Vital Signs Blog. Also appearing there were the Top 5 compilation every Saturday and a few articles of my composition.

* Our networking activities in July included my participation in the Business and Professional People for Life board meeting, attendance at a planning meeting for the remarkable *Inspired*

Bible exhibit coming to Omaha this fall, and our signing on to host a couple of shifts for Nebraska Right to Life’s information booth at the Nebraska State Fair out in Grand Island. And in an important “in-house” event, we fixed dinner and hosted VSM’s quarterly Board meeting.

* Our prayers and public witness outside the abortion business continued apace in July, though with ever diminishing numbers. (Sigh.) We were really blessed, however, this month by the extremely generous and talented services of Paula Peaslee who created 5 new pro-life banners for us to use on the street. They are terrific! And there’s our ongoing pro-life witness from our own front yard as you can see from our newest sign.



* Our Sunday afternoon church services at Aksarben Village Senior Living remain such a sweet blessing to us! July’s services saw more great music, more great fellowship before and afterward, and more great challenges from God’s Word -- delivered in short sermons. Interested in the titles and texts? Here they are for July:

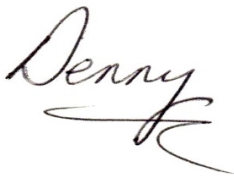
“The Reasons for Christ’s Miracles” (Matthew 9:1-8); “God Almighty, Israel’s Lord” (Exodus 6:2-4); “Living History” (Deuteronomy 4:9,10); and “Here I Raise My Ebenezer” (1 Samuel 7:10-13).

* With storm effects and with my continuing to mow, trim, and weed our new neighbor’s lawn while she was still in China, there was a lot of lawn work this past month. Claire and I also spent some quality time helping an elderly neighbor chop up branches and clean up her yard.

* Yes, it may be summer but still we were blessed to make several “Santa runs” whereby we bring personal greetings (and food!) to friends who are ill. Claire’s chocolate chip cookies are a standard feature (naturally) but this month’s visits also included hamburger soup, pumpkin muffins (Paleo), and treats from Panera. Along this line, we figured out how to have a couple of the delicious pies from Spear’s Restaurant delivered every week to the residents and staff at the care center in Wichita where my little sister Sherry lives.

* What else from our July calendar? Well, there was Claire’s appointment with a dermatologist; a modest celebration of my birthday (number 74, my goodness); a lot of social media activities and in-person social engagements -- including a gathering with Claire’s family in Lincoln and Zoom conversations every Tuesday with Denny’s siblings; reading; praying; dates together in which we enjoy conversation over London Fogs; and planning our annual Colorado mountain hike for the end of July.

Okay, I will close the July 2025 chapter of the Vital Signs Ministries story by thanking you for the prayers, encouragement, and support that makes it all possible. We are forever grateful to you all.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denny". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Postscript -- We cordially invite you to a couple of important Vital Signs Ministries events that are coming up soon. The first is the next Vital Signs letter-writing party. Well, actually there are two of them, each taking about 90 minutes. One is a morning brunch party on **Tuesday, August 5th** beginning at 10 o'clock with the evening event beginning at 7 on that same date. The location is at Denny & Claire’s home.

The second event is something we did very successfully back in 2017 and that is a home showing on **Saturday, August 23** of the outstanding, award-winning, one-man play, *An Evening with C.S. Lewis* starring David Payne. That DVD showing (informative, entertaining, inspirational) will take the place of Vital Signs Ministries’ Book Brunch for this quarter. It too will take place at our home, beginning at 7 in the evening with coffee, soft drinks, and desserts served during the intermission of the play. RSVPs are quite important for both opportunities.