

# FORUM

## Let go of your pitiful-me stories



**Nigel Alston**  
Motivational Moments

"Every man stamps his value on himself...Man is made great or small by his own will."  
- J.C.F. von Schiller

Do any of these phrases sound familiar to you?

- "I don't have time to...."
- "If only I didn't have so much to do, I could...."
- "I plan to do it; however,...."
- "I have the material for a book, but...."

They are very familiar to me. They are mine. I have used them (and others), at one time or another, not knowing that they were influencing my behavior, my decision-making and my ability to move forward successfully. In some cases, they were excuses I used for not doing something I was being challenged to do, something I said I wanted to do, or I lacked confidence in doing.

Recently, after reading an article ("Powerful Stories") by Molly Gordon, I realized the

need to make another shift in my thinking going into the new year. Gordon's message was just the reinforcement I needed.

According to Gordon, a certified professional coach who helps independent professionals and artists reconcile the challenges of building thriving livelihoods and loving their lives, there is power in the stories we tell. The phrases above and below, in Gordon's words, attest to the power of story. You have used and/or heard a few of these too, I'm sure:

- "That's the story of my life."
- "When I retire, I will...."
- "I don't have any money."
- "When things get better...."
- "If I didn't have bad luck, I would not have any luck at all."
- "You just don't understand."
- "What's your story?"
- "I want to hear the whole story."

I could identify with Gordon as I read about the poverty story she used once too often, that is until she had a shift in her thinking one day when being solicited to give money to a charity.

"I used to tell a poverty story as a matter of course," she wrote. Her story line, as she calls it, was: "I'm poor; poor me." It was reflected in comments like these.

"I can't afford it."

"I can't ever get ahead. Every time I save some money something breaks and I need to spend it."

An interesting thing happened one day as she was about to repeat that story line one more time, the "umpteenth time," as she describes it. She heard a voice in her mind say: "That's not true! That hasn't been true for years. I have about as much money as I choose to have, and, if I wanted to, I could contribute to this cause."

That's when she changed her story to one of possibility and plenty. Since that time, she says, she has paid attention to the story she is telling when she talks about money. Why? "I know that my financial success and stability are directly tied to the money stories I tell," she writes.

Ten years ago I had a similar story when challenged by a friend to write a column. "I can't. I'm not a writer," I told him repeatedly. He persisted in challenging me, and eventually I wrote a guest column for this paper. Because of a lack of confidence, it was several weeks later before I repeated the process and submitted another column. I was telling myself the wrong story. And I was living up to it.

"I can't."  
"I'm afraid."  
"What will people say?"  
"What will I write about?"

About five years ago, I had that same mental shift Gordon writes about. I changed my story. I made a commitment to write weekly, and the rest has taken care of itself. I told myself I would do it. I would sit in front of the blank computer screen and write. I held myself accountable instead of feeling sorry. I lived up to my new story.

Here are a few questions Gordon would have you consider:

Are you telling yourself a story that keeps you small? How would it be to let go of your old, sad stories and to accept responsibility for the great, good story of your life?

"Stories shape our experience; they explain or justify our decisions, focus our hopes and flesh out our dreams," writes Gordon. I agree. Your success is related to the story you tell. As the new year stares you in the face, think about this: Is it time to change your story?

*Nigel Alston is a radio talk-show host, columnist and motivational speaker. Visit his Web site at [www.motivationalmoments.com](http://www.motivationalmoments.com).*

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## Are gays welcome in the church?



**Rev. Barbara Reynolds**  
Guest Columnist

A network television ad showed three muscular church deacons kicking a homosexual couple weeping and bleeding from the church steps. A choir provided background music singing, "There's power in the blood."

Things have not reached such an ugly level yet, but they are heading in that direction. If you think a network wouldn't accept such a bigoted ad or that no church would perform such a cold-blooded act, remember this is a new era. The religious right and the Bush administration are calling the shots of the networks in one repugnant, unholy alliance, which is a dangerous threat to our First Amendment guarantee of freedom of speech.

CBS and NBC apparently have bowed to the climate established by the religious right by rejecting an advertisement for the United Church of Christ intended to show that all people - even gays - are welcome in their church. The ad showed two beefy bouncers behind velvet ropes turning away a man who appeared to be Hispanic, a young black woman and two men holding hands as they attempted to enter a church.

"Jesus didn't turn people away. Neither do we," the ad reassured. Officials of the Cleveland-based denomination with 6,000 congregations and 1.3 million members said the 30-second ad was intended to emphasize its inclusiveness.

NBC's rejection notice called the ad "too controversial." ABC has a blanket policy against religious advertisements. But it was CBS that let the cat out of the bag that its rejection was political. In



a written explanation to the church's ad agency, CBS said, "The executive branch has recently endorsed a constitutional amendment to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman."

Also R. Albert Mohler Jr., one of the trumpeters of the religious right, fumed that the ad was "diabolical."

"So is the press a lap dog of the religious right? And what an over-reaction. The ad said nothing about same-sex marriages, but even if it had, are Christians supposed to take a hard-hearted attitude against homosexuals as being unworthy to sit down in a church just because the religious right says so? Churches are full of adulterers, liars, backbiters and thieves. So why should homosexuals be excluded from church, which is supposed to express the love of Christ for all people."

Rev. Ruth Harvey is the first African-American pastor of the previously all-white Trinity United Church of Christ in York, Pa. She said: "The ad was just saying

that God is still welcoming all into His home. I will not perform same-sex weddings. I do not preach a compromised Gospel. Yet, we should all be careful about creating categories of 'us' and 'them' because once we were all sinners. Church is the one place you can come in a sinner and leave a saint if you adhere to the Word."

The ad flap does, however, touch a sensitive nerve in church communities because many Christians treat homosexuals as lepers, forgetting that Jesus hung around the lepers and healed them. On the other hand, although biblical texts, such as I Corinthians 6:9, list homosexuality as a transgression that will keep sinners out of heaven, many gay rights leaders deny that it is a sin.

"Just like in that ad, I have felt like I was not welcome in many churches," said Bishop Kwabena Rainey Cheeks of Inner Light Ministries in Washington, D.C. "If you are gay or lesbian, Christians are too quick to tell us we are going to hell.

They are building bridges instead of walls. Show me where Jesus discriminates. Jesus cared about the least of them and fought against the oppression of the religious oppressors and the government, instead of locking hands with them as the church is doing today."

Cheeks, who has AIDS, also says the oppressive, judgmental actions of Christians are forcing more black men to hide their homosexuality by dating women, many of whom they find in the church. Unfortunately, this lifestyle, called the "down low," is one reason for the feminization of HIV/AIDS. In 1998 African-American women constituted 64 percent of new female AIDS cases.

So where does this leave the church? Bouncing the homosexuals out of the churches, as would please the religious right? Tolerating same-sex marriages?

There is a better way advocated by Pastor Keith Magee of the Berachah Church in Boston. "Christians should be winning souls to Christ. How does one get to know Him in truth, if they are excluded from being where truth is being delivered? It is God's work to clean and to sanctify us; man does not have that ability."

"I do not believe that homosexuality is of God and I will not validate that lifestyle, but I will not close my church doors to anyone."

I would argue that only those who have not sinned or are big hypocrites are qualified to shut others out of church. Who, then, will be the first to block the door?

*Rev. Barbara Reynolds, the religion columnist for NNPA, is an author of four books, including "Out Of Hell & Living Well: Healing from the Inside Out." She graduated from Howard University School of Divinity and the United Theological Seminary, where she earned a doctorate in ministry. She can be reached at [www.reynoldsnews.com](http://www.reynoldsnews.com).*

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