RE-AUTHORING SPIRITUAL NARRATIVES:
GOD IN PERSONS’ RELATIONAL
IDENTITY STORIES

THOMAS D. CARLSON, Ph.D.
North Dakota State University

MARTIN J. ERICKSON, M.S.
Iowa State University

In important ways, the shift toward social constructionist therapies in marriage and family therapy is opening the door to include spiritual and religious issues in therapy. This article explores the benefits of using narrative therapy with religious and/or spiritual persons with regard to their personal relationship with God. A rationale is given for personal identity stories to be recast as relational identity stories. Relationships are seen as key factors in the constitution and perpetuation of one’s identity story. Re-authoring spiritual narratives draws on a person’s relationship with God and how this relationship influences the relational identity story of the person. The practices of externalizing conversations, deconstruction, exploring unique outcomes, re-authoring, and re-membering are explained as used in working with a person’s relational identity stories and relationship with God. Examples of questions are given for each practice. Throughout the discussion, an account of a woman the first author worked with in therapy is given for illustration of these ideas.

A belief in God plays a very important role in the lives of a vast majority of the U.S. population. Ninety-four percent of the population in the U.S. believe in God (Gallup & Jones, 1989). Additionally, almost 9 in 10 American adults say they pray to God at least occasionally (Gallup, 1993). In the same poll,
66% of respondents stated that if they were considering therapy, they would prefer to have a therapist who represented spiritual values and beliefs. Moreover, 81% would prefer a therapist who enabled them to integrate their values and belief system into the counseling process (cf. Erickson, 1998; Gallup, 1993). A Gallup survey in 1990 showed that the rate of religious commitment and involvement have remained fairly constant in the United States over the past 60 years (Gallup, 1990). Despite the religious nature of our culture, the religious and spiritual aspects of clients' lives were an unexplored part of the therapy process for a long time in the field of marriage and family therapy (MFT).

Recently, however, there appears to be a growing appreciation for the importance of exploring the religious and spiritual dimensions of clients' lives. In a recent study exploring family therapists' beliefs about the appropriateness of including religious and spiritual aspects in therapy, Carlson (1996) found that 72% of the respondents believed that spiritually is relevant in their clinical practice. This study also found that 86% of the family therapists surveyed believed there is a relationship between spiritual health and mental health. This growing interest can also be seen in the number of journal articles being published and the number of presentations at national conferences that address the importance of considering the religious and spiritual aspects of clients' lives (for example Adams, 1995; Anderson, 1994; Anderson & Worthen, 1997; Beevar, 1996; Butler & Harper, 1994; Carlson, 1996; Carlson & Erickson, 1998, 1999; Erickson, 1998; Griffith, 1986; Griffèt, 1995; Joandes, 1996; Prest & Keller, 1993; Ross, 1994; Standen, Piercy, Mackinnon, Helmeke, 1994; Walsh, 1998, 1999). The topics of these articles and presentations have ranged from issues related to training therapists regarding how to work with religious and spiritual clients to promoting theoretical integration of the religious and spiritual aspects of clients' lives.

During roughly the same time, the field has also experienced a growing acceptance and appreciation of social constructionist theory (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Anderson, 1997; de Shazer, 1991, 1994; Gergen, 1991, 1994; Gergen & McNamee, 1999; Gilligan & Price, 1993; Jordan, 1997; White & Epstein, 1990; White, 1995, 1997). We do not believe that these two movements in the field at the same time is merely coincidence. Perhaps the questioning of “Truth” and the encouragement of a multiplicity of voices, which social constructionism encourages, has opened up space for many previously marginalized voices to gain legitimacy in the field. Alternative ways of knowing and experiencing life that were previously marginalized because of their lack of scientific basis have become more viable. Even though the previously marginalized voice of spirituality has increased, Gergen (1998) has argued that it is still underrepresented. In his foreword to The Handbook of Constructive Therapies, he applauds the multiplicity of voices that are shared in the book but recognizes the lack of voice by “the teeming number of therapists whose practices are nourished by the discourse of spirit, love, and God” (p. xiv). He further challenges that room be made for these voices. Inspired by this invitation, we hope to add our voice to the growing number of voices that see the value of honoring the spiritual and religious aspects of our clients' lives.

It has been our experience that social constructionist theories provide a natural framework for incorporating the religious and spiritual beliefs of clients' lives. In particular, we have found that the principles of narrative therapy offer a unique way of allowing therapists to enter into the spiritual stories of persons lives. This belief appears to be supported by Carlson's (1996) study, which shows that family therapists who take narrative therapy as the most helpful theory to be used when working with religious and spiritual clients. The purpose of this article is to explore the possibilities of using a narrative therapy approach (White, 1995, 1997; White & Epstein, 1990) when working with religious/spiritual persons with regard to their relationship with God.

**PERSONAL BELIEFS**

Our beliefs and the beliefs of those whose experiences inspired this article are situated in many ways within Western Judeo-Christian traditions. But, it is our hope that these ideas can have worthwhile application in other belief systems and contexts of therapy. We believe God is a loving and merciful God. We try not to impose our view of God on the people we work with, but rather let our clients inform us as to how they prefer to see God. This requires an ongoing relationally based reflexivity on our part as we meet with people in therapy. While many of the people we have worked with did not experience God as loving and merciful, their preferences and desires were to believe that God is such. A common tradition of thought in the psychology is to view the religious or spiritual beliefs a person has as being pathological or constraining of their life. In many instances, we have found it much more helpful to view the problem's version of the person's relationship with God to be that which is constraining, rather than the religious or spiritual beliefs the person has. This belief is based on the very powerful re-authoring experiences of the persons we have

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1. In the research cited, 45% of respondents choose narrative therapy for this question. Interestingly, only 17% of the respondents indicated that they use narrative therapy in their own practice. N = 15: clinical AAMFT members.

2. Although much scholarly work has been meticulous in rendering differing definitions between "religious" and "spiritual," and although these differing definitions do provide some clarity in some discussions, we feel that for the purposes of this article, defining the words differently tends to imply a dichotomy that may not be helpful. Therefore, we have decided to not make a clear distinction between the two, but to instead allow "religious/spiritual" to be read in whatever way may be most helpful to the reader. For many people, such a distinction is very important. We encourage therapists to ask their clients to inform them about their personal distinctions between religiosity and spirituality.
We have found that providing an integrated, holistic approach to mental health care, which addresses spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of well-being, can be very effective. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of all aspects of our lives and is based on the belief that true healing comes from within. By fostering a sense of community and belonging, we can create an environment where individuals feel supported and empowered to make positive changes in their lives. This approach has been shown to be effective in treating a wide range of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and addiction. It also promotes overall well-being and can help prevent the development of mental health issues. In conclusion, providing an integrated, holistic approach to mental health care is essential for promoting lasting change and improving the lives of those who seek help. It is our hope that by working together, we can create a world where everyone has access to the support and resources they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives.
their lives largely depends on whether they experience their relationships with others differently. Therefore, an externalizing conversation about the problem’s version of their significant relationships can provide a wonderful source of help in the re-authoring process.

The shift from individual identity stories to relational identity stories is rooted in a social constructionist approach to the self as being inherently relational, non-autonomous, and non-individualistic (Gergen, 1991, 1994; Gergen & McNamee, 1999; White, 1995). Focusing on the relational identity story allows therapists working from a narrative metaphor to more clearly see the relational nature of the self, and thus the significance of culture and social influences. This focus also allows therapists to be more clearly aware of the principles of social constructionism and its distinction from essentialist and modernist notions of an individual self.

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The principle of relational identity stories is the foundation of this theoretical approach to working with religious/spiritual persons. We will discuss throughout the remainder of this article how this principle of relational stories can be introduced into the practices of narrative therapy. Examples of specific questions that fit into the deconstructive and re-authoring aspects of narrative therapy will be provided. The ideas for this whole approach are largely inspired by the story and experiences of a woman Tom worked with who experienced the transformative power of this work in her life. In order to honor that relational experience, we will include her story and experiences as illustrative of these ideas throughout the article.

The Relational Identity Stories of Religious/Spiritual Persons

As mentioned above, it is our belief that the relationships that are the most significant in a person’s life will carry the most meaning or have the most power in constructing a dominant identity story. When working with religious and/or spiritually committed persons, it is important to consider the importance of their relationship with God. For religious/spiritual persons, their relationship with God is very real. It is not a “stagnant relationship, but dynamic and living” (Butler & Harper, 1994, p. 279). Because God is often one of the most significant people in a religious/spiritual person’s life, this relationship has a very powerful constitutive effect. The way a religious/spiritual person views God’s perception of him or herself as a person plays a powerful role in the development of a relational identity story. For example, if a woman thinks that God is disappointed with her or that God thinks she is not a worthy person, it will have a powerful influence on her story of herself.

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When working with religious/spiritual people, we have found it helpful to incorporate questions that explore the meaning they have given to their relationship with God, or in other words, what their perception is about how God sees them as persons. Questions that explore the religious/spiritual person’s relational story with God add light to where problems may have their support. The following are some questions that we have found helpful in exploring a person’s relational identity story with God:

- How do you believe God thinks of you as a person?
- What is your perception of God’s view of you as a person?
- How do you think God sees you as a person?
- How do you think God sees others?

Because many religious/spiritual persons consider their relationship with God to be very personal, it is important to discover what the relational identity story with God is. While this article focuses on impoverishing relational identity stories, it is quite possible that a very empowering relational story with God exists. If this is the case, then this relationship can be used as a resource to challenge the problems in a person’s life. Ultimately, this is the purpose of exploring and deconstructing relational identity stories—to re-author a relationship that can have the power to transform a story, and thus a life.

**Example of Exploring a Relational Identity Story with Regard to God**

The idea to explore a relational identity story with God came from my (T.C.) experience working with Debbie. Debbie suffered the pains of physical and sexual abuse as a child by the hands of a very important and close person in her life. She also suffered life-threatening physical abuse by her first husband. Despite these experiences, Debbie was able to stand up to the abuse in some very powerful ways. There were many acts of courage and strength in Debbie’s life in the face of this abuse; however, at the time of our initial meeting these significant events were not part of her story. The meaning that she initially gave to these experiences was that the experiences of abuse in her life happened because she “had not learned how to properly control others.” Debbie was remarried to a person she described as a “gentle man” and was the mother of two children. The experiences of abuse were at least 10 years behind her. Her life was going very well and she felt like she had overcome being “controlled by others.”

She came to therapy because she had again experienced being controlled by another person in an abusive manner. The feelings of depression and guilt re-
turned, and she questioned her ability to control her life. The effects of depression and guilt were overwhelming. While there was an abundance of powerful and courageous events that were part of Debbie’s experience, depression and guilt had a totalizing effect and began to rewrite the history of her life. Depression and guilt led her to believe that because the abuse happened again, she could not trust anyone. In order to be safe, she needed to protect herself from all physical contact with others (except her husband and children). Any type of touch from another person scared her. She felt like the only way to be safe and in control of what happened to her was to avoid touching anyone and avoid trusting or opening up to another person. This meant not attending church anymore, even though it was painful for her not to go. Depression and guilt also led her to believe that she was responsible for the abuse, that she let these things happen due to her weakness.

Debbie described herself as being very depressed, feeling she was a worthless and weak person. She hated herself for not being able to go to church anymore, but she felt like she could not allow herself to be close to anyone. During our first visits together we began to explore the effects of depression and guilt in her life. This was done by using deconstructing questions and externalizing conversations about depression and guilt. Usually, as externalizing conversations are used, a separation begins to take place between the person and the problem. This was not happening with Debbie. Knowing that Debbie was a very religious/spiritual person, I asked Debbie about her relationship with God toward the end of the second visit. I asked, “Debbie how do you think God feels about you as a person?” Debbie answered, “I don’t think that he loves me. He is disappointed with me. I have let him down.”

For a religiously committed person to believe that God does not love her is very significant in the development of her relational identity story. Imagine believing that God loves everyone and wants to help them but that God does not love you. What must that mean about your worth as a person? This is what Debbie was experiencing. She believed that God loved everyone but that somehow she was not loved. She felt worthless.

Her relational identity story of worthlessness in God’s eyes was so powerful that the normal externalization process did not have any effect. It became clear that exploring the effects of depression and guilt in her life and relationships without exploring her relational identity story with God would probably not be powerful enough to give her the freedom to re-author her story. From this point on we began to explore her relational story with God.

**Externalizing Conversations and Deconstructing Questions**

Problems have the effect of speaking to people about their identities and relationships, creating a story of who they are. This has the effect of leading people to describe themselves in internalized ways (i.e., saying “I am depressed,” “I am worthless,” etc.). Using externalizing language helps people separate themselves from the problem’s influence in their lives and relationships by exploring specifically how the problem has recruited them into that particular lifestyle and way of thinking (i.e., “When depression enters your life, how does it get you to think about yourself? About your relationships?”).

Deconstruction questions attempt to explore the problem’s influence on persons’ lives and to “unpack” where these influences get a foothold and gain strength over their lives. These questions also attempt to explore the influence of the problem in a way that invites them to view the problem as separate from themselves. Narrative therapy takes a political position that problems are active agents in people’s lives and that they have a negative and destructive agenda.

Problems work hard at putting a wedge between people and the significant relationships of their lives, leaving them isolated. For religious/spiritual persons, this isolation can occur as they are recruited into impoverishing stories about their relationship with God. If a person has an identity story about their relationship with God that is centered, for example, around worthlessness, it can be helpful to explore how the problem has influenced the development of this relational identity story. The following are some examples of questions that have been helpful for us:

- How do you think [worthlessness] has influenced the way you see your relationship with God?
- What do you think [worthlessness] wants you to see about your relationship with God and how God views you as a person?
- What do you think [worthlessness’s] intentions are in getting you to think in this way?
- What would be [worthlessness’s] purpose in keeping you believing that God doesn’t love you?
- What might happen to [worthlessness] if you were able to see your relationship with God differently?

These questions are helpful because they offer people a different way of looking at and experiencing themselves and their relationship with the problem. They also offer them the opportunity to see their relationship with God in a different light by helping them explore how the problem is promoting these particular beliefs, which allows them to separate the problem from their identities. They no longer are the problem; the problem becomes a separate entity, and they can then experience the freedom to fight the problem’s influence in their lives. If a religious/spiritual person believes that God is disappointed in him or her, that he or she is worthless, then including the problem’s influence in promoting this belief is very important. If a new identity story is being created without externalizing the problem’s influence in the person’s relationship with God, then the problem will still have a hold on a very significant relationship
in that person’s life, and a transformative experience might be less likely. Again, we want to emphasize that we do not believe that it is the relationship with God that is the problem. We believe this relationship to be potentially transformative. The deconstruction questions are aimed at revealing the problem’s influence in stealing the transformative aspects of this relationship from the religious/spiritual person.

Unique Outcomes, Alternate Stories, and Re-authoring Questions

A new story is constructed by noticing or rescuing events or experiences that contradict the problem-saturated story. These events are called unique outcomes or sparkling events (White & Epston, 1990). Because we use narratives to make sense of our lives, when we have an identity that is impoverishing we usually remember only those events that fit within the themes or plot of such an identity. Therefore, if a person has been recruited into an identity of being worthless, that person would only remember or give meaning to those experiences that prove an identity of worthlessness. There are many experiences, however, that are looked over and not given meaning. The process of finding unique outcomes requires the therapist to look and listen for experiences that seem to not fit with the dominant story and ask the person about this. When these events or experiences are noticed by the therapist, he or she can explore with the person the significance of these events and the possible meanings they could have. By exploring the meaning of these experiences, the therapist gives the person an opportunity to story these events as part of their identity.

When working with religious/spiritual people, we have found that the influence of the dominant stories, such as worthlessness and disappointment, is very powerful. Many of the people who consult us describe how the problem has gotten them to take responsibility or blame themselves for all the bad experiences in their lives. Quite often, the meaning they have given to these experiences is that God is punishing them for being bad, that they must have done something wrong, or that God must not love them. They have also described how the influence of the problem and the dominant story has not allowed them to notice and/or accept any responsibility for the blessings and many good things they experience in their lives. While such blessing exist in their lives, the influence of the dominant story does not give them the opportunity to give meaning to these experiences of being blessed, or even to notice them. In other words, they are completely to blame for the negative events in their lives, but have nothing to do with the blessings.

We have found that helping religious/spiritual people internalize personal agency (Tomm, 1989) concerning the blessing of their lives can be a powerful tool to fighting the destructive influence of the problem and helps open space for a preferred identity story about their relationship with God. Often this per-

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sonal agency seems to come from simply realizing or noticing the blessings God has given them, that they are agents and have choice to see God in their lives or not. Additionally, this sense of personal agency comes from seeing the deceptive tactics of problems that have kept them from seeing the blessings God has given them. For many people, realizing that they have taken steps of faith or action that resulted in these blessings can also be powerful. Differing beliefs regarding faith versus works and other similar issues may pose a difficulty in talking about personal agency in the receipt of blessings from God, and it is critical that the therapist first understand the basic beliefs of the person around such issues. Then the therapist can ask questions that are tailored to their clients’ specific beliefs. Some of the questions that we have found helpful include:

- Can you tell me about a time when you have experienced being blessed by God?
- What was this experience like for you? How did you feel?
- How is it that you are aware of this blessing having come about in your life?
- What does it say about you that you noticed this blessing in your life and were able to recognize it when it came to you?
- Have you always been aware of God’s blessings in your life? If not, how have you become aware of the blessings God has given you?
- Did this blessing just simply come into your life, did it just happen? Did you as a person, or your belief, faith, or actions have any part in this blessing taking place?
- What might being blessed in this way say about you as a person? What do these blessing tell you about how God thinks and feels about you as a person?
- This blessing doesn’t seem to fit with [worthlessness’s] description of you as a person. What alternative description of you do these blessing fit with? Is this alternative description closer to how God sees you as a person?
- What does God see, feel, and know about you as a person that [worthlessness] sometimes does not allow you to see, feel, or know?

These questions will most often need to be modified so that they are sensitive and “experience near” the personal beliefs and faith of each person one may work with.

According to the people who consult us, these re-authoring questions have had a very powerful impact on their lives. They have shared with us that having a sense of personal agency in noticing and/or receiving blessing that have come into their lives has helped them believe and feel that God does love them and they are worthy people. These conversations can often be emotionally moving and faith promoting.
Example of Externalizing and Re-authoring Relational Identity Stories

Returning to the work that Debbie and I experienced together, an understanding of her identity story of not being loved by God was an important discovery for us. We decided to redefine the problem as “worthlessness” rather than “depression” because Debbie expressed that this fit her experience better. Our initial investigation into the effects of worthlessness on her life was a general one and not specific to her relationship with God. We explored how worthlessness affected her personal life and her relationship with her husband and two children. This exploration revealed that one of the tactics that worthlessness used on her was to encourage her to remember her abuse and believe that she was responsible for what happened. She also shared how guilt would lead her to believe that she could have done something to stop the abuse and that because of that she was sinful or “dirty.” It should be noted that a very specific exploration of the politics and effects of abuse techniques and tactics was a significant part of our work together, but due to limitations of space this will not be included here.

This investigation of the politics of abuse and the tactics of worthlessness and guilt were then extended to explore how they influenced her relationship with God. We explored the meanings that worthlessness and guilt had led her to give to her experiences of abuse as they related to her relationship with God. Debbie shared that because of her belief that God protects the people that He loves from harm, the only thing that made sense to her was that she must not deserve God’s love and that she must somehow be responsible for what happened to her, that she was being punished. She expressed how she wanted so badly for God to love her, but couldn’t believe that she was worthy of God’s love. This exploration was heart-wrenching for both of us. Externalizing conversations had begun regarding the effects of worthlessness and guilt in general, but I feared that because of the power worthlessness and guilt had in her relationship with God, an in-depth exploration of the effects of worthlessness and guilt might actually contribute to her experiencing further guilt and traumatization. Therefore, we began to deconstruct the dominant story of God not loving her and her not deserving God’s love by exploring the times that she experienced God’s love and protection in her life.

Debbie had a difficult time thinking of unique outcomes initially, but on reflection she was able to come up with quite a list of experiences. She shared how she felt that God had led her to her present husband, how God had given her the strength to stand up to the abuse of her first husband, and the blessing of having her children. We explored the role that she played in recognizing and in bringing about these blessings. (It is Debbie’s personal belief that when a person keeps or follows God’s commandments, God then blesses that person accordingly.) I asked her, “I am wondering what part you might have played in bringing these blessing about in your life? I mean, what did you do to prepare yourself for these blessings?” Debbie was struck by this question and said, “I have never thought about it that way. I guess that I must have done something to deserve these blessings in my life.” I then asked Debbie what these experiences say about how God feels about her as a person. She responded, “He must love me.” I asked her what His love says about her as a person, and she said, “That I am worthy of His love.” Our session ended, and as she was leaving she reached out and touched me on the shoulder thanking me for what we had talked about. This was a significant step for Debbie. In our first visit, she told me that she did not want to shake hands because touching another person scared her. By the end of our third visit she felt compelled to reach out and touch my shoulder. In later visits we discussed the significance of this development for her.

Recognizing that she was an agent in the blessings of her life brought about a dramatic change in her relational identity story. For the first time in a long time she was able to say that God loves her and that she is worthy of God’s love. She returned to our next visit very excited to share something with me. She told me that for the past few years she felt that she has had a special relationship with the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit guided her to make many important decisions in her life and also that she has had many spiritual experiences where she was able to discern the needs of others. After hearing this, I wanted her to give meaning to these experiences, so we explored what this relationship with the Spirit says about the type of person she is and what types of people God blesses with these experiences. Debbie explained how she believes that God trusts the people that He gives spiritual experiences to and that meant that He must trust her too. This realization was a powerful one for her, and tears ran down her cheeks when she described it.

After establishing some alternate stories about Debbie’s identity and relationship with God, we began to explore further the tactics and intentions of worthlessness and guilt in her relational story with God. Since she now believed that she was loved by God and that God trusted her, this investigation was easier for Debbie. I asked her, “Knowing what you do now about your relationship with God, how is it that worthlessness was able to trick you into believing that God doesn’t love you? What tactics did worthlessness and/or guilt use to do this?” Debbie responded, “Whenever something would go wrong in my life, they would make me look back on my abuse as proof that God didn’t protect me then and therefore must not care for me today and that I don’t deserve to be protected because I am a bad person.” Her responses were similar when I asked questions such as, “When worthlessness and guilt began to enter your life, what are some of the things that they got you to think about?” and “What are some of the specific messages that they send you about God’s feelings for you?”

Lastly, I asked her, “As you look back on your life knowing what you know now, do you think that worthlessness and guilt were telling you the truth or were they lying to you?” Her response was, “I know that they were lying to me!” in a very emphatic tone. I was curious about this statement and wanted to
The image contains a page of text that is not clearly visible due to the quality of the image. However, based on the visible parts, it appears to be discussing concepts related to emotions and the impact of emotional reactions on decision-making. The text is fragmented, and there are phrases that are cut off, making it difficult to provide a coherent summary. The text seems to touch on the idea that emotions can influence how people perceive and respond to information, potentially leading to biases or suboptimal decisions.
calling the police and changing the locks on the doors. She then said that knowing how violent he was she was surprised that he never killed her because she felt many times that he would. Debbie also spoke of times directly related to other abusive situations and how she remembered being warned by the Spirit that something bad was going to happen. She believes now that these spiritual promptings prevented many abusive situations from happening and stopped others from becoming much worse because she was able to prepare herself. Previously, the problem's version of her relational story with God was that God never protected her against the abuse and that God did not care because she was unworthy of God's love. Now these very experiences became a powerful witness to God's love and protection for her.

I was curious about these new descriptions and new stories about her life and asked her what these events said about the type of person that she was. She believed that it meant that she was a very strong person. I then asked her what these events said or meant about her relationship with God. She said, "I can see now that He has always protected me. Bad things happened to people because others have agency and do things that hurt people. God protected me by not letting those things get worse and giving me the strength to stand up to the abuse when it happened."

Through these re-remembering questions Debbie was not only able to create a new story about her present relationship with God, but she also re-storied the meaning of the past. Although the same experiences surrounded both the new story and the old story, her new story allowed her to redefine what those events meant for her life. Rather than being examples of weakness and God's lack of love, they became symbols of her strength and God's faithful love and protection for her. Debbie now felt a very real sense of membership with God that she had not previously been feeling. Her statements show that she felt a renewed and strong connection to God that fit very well with her belief and faith in God and her desires and preferences to feel emotionally and spiritually close to Him.

As a side note, I had the pleasure of seeing Debbie at a religious activity (the place where we met was a place where Debbie previously felt unworthy to attend) about one year following our last visit together. Our work together ended because she had moved to take care of her mother. During that year some incredible things happened in her life. She made amends with her mother, who abandoned her when she was 14. She connected with her father again and forgave him for years of abuse. (He also apologized sincerely.) Through her efforts her father and mother were together with all the family during the final moments of her mother's life. Her father played a central role in the daily care taking of his ex-wife. The family was close again, and many old wounds were healed. When her mother passed away, Debbie moved to be closer to her father so that she could take care of him because he is approaching death. The joy all this had brought to her life was easily apparent. It was wonderful experience for me to see her again.

CONCLUSION

This article has presented a shift from the common idea of identity stories in narrative therapy to a broadened concept of relational identity stories. Shifting the focus from an individual identity story to a relational identity story opens up space for all relevant relationships to be explored in the deconstructing, re-authoring, and re-membering processes, especially concerning the person's relationship with God. We have shared an experience with Debbie to demonstrate how the concept of a relational identity story opened the door to the re-authoring process and how this concept fits into each part of narrative therapy. Our main intent has been to offer an experience of how narrative therapy can be used to help religious/spiritual persons re-author their relationship with God, by offering some examples of questions that can be used in this process. We are not trying to present a model or demonstrate how this should be done, but rather we are sharing some ideas that have been helpful for us and many people who have consulted with us. We hope that these ideas encourage others to write about their experiences working with religious and spiritual persons in regard to their relationship with God.

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