

My Journey:

First Movement – The Life of a Tree

There is a profound similarity between the life of a tree and that of a human being. When we observe a tree, we notice its outer form—the texture of the bark, the shape of the trunk, the colour of the leaves, and the spread of its branches. Yet, beneath this visible exterior lies a hidden story. No two trees are the same, even those growing side by side in a plantation.

If we cut across the trunk of a tree, its rings reveal a life story. These rings tell us its age, where it endured pain, whether it survived a forest fire, or suffered through sickness and struggle. We can see the impact of external forces—harsh winds, difficult terrain, or years of stress.

In much the same way, humans have an inner life, often hidden from the world. Yet, we are invited to share our stories, to bring what is hidden into the light, and in doing so, to find freedom. Trees have a remarkable ability to keep growing despite their wounds. Their knots, twists, and scars add to their beauty and character, shaping them into masterpieces. Likewise, our own pain and challenges shape us, adding depth to our existence.

Second Movement – A Personal Story

As a white, Afrikaans-speaking male born in apartheid South Africa during the 1960s, I experienced a seemingly carefree childhood as the son of a Dutch Reformed Church pastor. But this journey is not about blame or shame—it is about the courage to be vulnerable and to embrace true freedom, the freedom to love authentically.

At some point, I was confronted with the question: *What is my life's purpose?* The messages I absorbed growing up shaped my sense of value. I wrestled with feelings of rejection and isolation while also feeling set apart and placed on a pedestal. Our personalities are shaped by both nature and nurture—by the experiences we have and the narratives we internalize. My worldview, like everyone else's, is filtered through my own unique “Andri lenses,” influencing how I perceive and interpret reality.

A defining challenge in my journey was understanding purpose. I came to realize that my purpose is not tied to external validation but to becoming the best version of myself. This required me to examine my illusions, my dominant self-beliefs, and how they shaped my perception of the world and others.

I learned that I am more than my past, my mistakes, or the circumstances of my upbringing. True growth is not about escaping our past but befriending our pain and vulnerability. We are all wounded somehow—can we help each other see beyond what is immediately visible?

Mere knowledge was not enough to bring change. It was within the safe, relational space of spiritual direction and pastoral therapy that I found healing and freedom.



Third Movement – A Relational Story

This personal journey intensified when I stepped into marriage. My awakening came when my wife told me, *"I am not responsible for your happiness."*

At first, I was devastated. *How could she say something like that?* But in time, I realized I had placed an impossible expectation on her. It wasn't about being unhappy in our marriage—it was about being unhappy with myself. I had become too dependent, too enmeshed in *us*, leaving no space for *me*. Slowly, I realized I was more than our marriage.

As relational beings, we all long for connection and belonging. But I needed to understand what marriage truly meant. Why do relationships struggle? Why do some fall apart? My search for answers led me to relationship theory and the Imago movement, which explores why marriages fail. I discovered that marriage is not simply about personal happiness—it is about healing each other's childhood wounds.

This revelation was transformative. I began to see marriage as a space for mutual healing—a form of therapy in itself. In essence, marriage is the smallest form of group therapy, where deep, vulnerable, and unconditional listening holds the power to heal.

Fourth Movement – Social Cohesion

Growing up in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, I was largely unaware of the inequalities and politics of apartheid South Africa. My world felt safe, privileged, and untouched. I remember stopping at a gas station as a child and seeing a sign that read: *"Europeans Only."* I asked my parents, *"Who are these Europeans?"* I had no concept of what was unfolding around me.

Today, I am confronted with my ingrained perspectives on race, class, gender-based violence, and movements like Black Lives Matter. These global and local struggles challenge us to listen deeply, acknowledge the pain of the past and honour the lived experiences of others.

We do not all experience the world in the same way. As a white, Afrikaans-speaking, heterosexual, middle-class male, I grew up in a system that benefited me. How, then, do I truly listen to stories different from my own? Stories of inclusion and exclusion, of stereotypes and social divisions? The challenge is not just to acknowledge these realities but to actively participate in rewriting a more just and compassionate narrative.

Fifth Movement – A Spiritual Journey

At the core of all these realisations is a spiritual journey. Emotional and spiritual maturity are deeply connected. Carl Jung believed that life itself is a spiritual journey—one that seeks intimacy with self and with God. *Who am I? Whose am I? And who is God?*

Augustine's words in his prayer, *Finding God After a Long Search*, resonate deeply:

"Too late have I loved You, O Beauty so ancient, O Beauty so new. Too late have I loved You! You were within me, but I was outside myself, and there I sought You!"



The compassion of Christ is at the heart of this journey. The *cura animarum*—the care of the human soul—has long been central to humanity’s search for meaning in suffering. Jesus met those deemed too sick, too sinful, or too broken for society. He saw in them what others did not: the image and likeness of God. His radical, unconditional acceptance carried the power to heal, to restore, and to transform lives.

An Invitation to Healing and Freedom

I invite you—individual or a couple—on a lifelong journey toward healing and freedom. A journey that embraces our hidden stories, our pain, and our woundedness in ourselves, our relationships, and our communities.

Let us create a safe, courageous space where we can be seen. Where we can change our perceptions of who we are. Where we dare to listen deeply, grow in compassion, and heal our relationships and communities.

We are not victims of our past. We are the authors of a new story—one that will shape our homes, our marriages, and the world we leave for our children.

Andri Eloff

