

You have joined a group in order to be a part of developing a caring community where Word and Spirit discipleship happens. To experience momentum toward either of those goals, we must look back at the story God is writing in our own life and become familiar with the story he is writing in other group members' lives. Sharing our stories will build our faith, bring honor to God, and accelerate the development of relational trust in our group.

God is the master storyteller – His self revelation is captured in a sweeping narrative and then given to us in the Book that grips our heart and captures our soul. God also creates a story within each person's life, a story we are meant to tell. And since we are called to tell our story, we are also called to listen to the stories of others. God is calling us to fully explore, to fully enjoy, and to fully capture the power of the Great Story, the Gospel. And we are to invite others to immerse themselves in the Great Story. One way we do this is by listening to our lesser stories and then telling them to others." Dan Allender

God acts in history and in your and my brief histories not as a puppeteer who sets the scene and works the strings but rather as the great director who no matter what role fate casts us in conveys to us somehow from the wings, if we have our eyes, ears, hearts open and sometimes even if we don't, how we can play those roles in a way to enrich and ennoble and hallow the whole vast drama of things including our own small but crucial parts in it. – Fredrick Buechner"

Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact. Robert McKee

"Your story has power in your life, and it has power and meaning to bring to others. I want your story to stir me, draw me to tears, compel me to ask hard questions. I want to enter your heartache and join you in the hope of redemption. But your story can't do these things if you can't tell it. You can't tell your story until you know it. And you can't truly know it without owning your part in writing it. And you won't write a really glorious story until you've wrestled with the Author (God) who has already written long chapters of your life, some of them not to your liking." Dan Allender

Be yourself, everyone else is already taken. Oscar Wilde

"When I study and understand my life story, then I can join God as Coauthor. I don't have to settle for merely being a reader of my life; God calls me to be a writer of my future. He asks me to take the only life I will ever be given and shape it in the direction he outlines for me. I am to keep writing, moving forward into the plot that God has woven into the sinews of my soul". Dan Allender

How will we go about sharing our stories?

Experience has taught us that sharing the highlights of our story in about 7-10 minutes works great in groups. The time will go by more quickly than you think. Limiting the time will encourage faithful preparation and honors the range of listening capacity represented by different group members. So each week we will have some folks share their story, until we have all had a turn. We will set a simple timer on someone's phone and do our best to honor the 10 minute allotted time. REMEMBER The goal isn't someone's entire life story – but some key highlights that will help other group members see what God has already done and how to come alongside with encouragement and perspective.

What do I do with the tragic parts of my story?

Look into them asking for God's perspective, and being alert to His shepherding. A tragic circumstance can define and anchor you – holding you back from your calling and destiny, OR it can pull back the curtain to reveal the power of God to bring beauty from ashes, and transformation through pain. Don't ignore it but walk back into it, with God beside you and ask him to show you what he wants you to do, think, feel or address. As you share these parts of your story don't be surprised by God's presence and ministry to and through others in your group.

As I listen to someone else's story what do I do or say?

First listen and allow your eyes to see from the storyteller's perspective and that of the Creator / Author. Honor the person with your focused attention. Pray for the storyteller(s) after the meeting and write down what God puts on your heart. Ask the Lord if you are to share anything with them, and if so when and how. Your role is not to co-author another person's story, but God may lead you to come alongside as a cheerleader, a challenger, an advocate, or a loving friend who shares the journey.

How should I organize my story, and what should I include?

Prayerfully ask for God's help and direction, in order to discern what's most important to share now, and how best to communicate it. Often our stories may take a seasonal flow – i.e. we may highlight our journey and the people, and situations that have shaped us by seasons of life (i.e. middle school, high school, college, etc.) OR you may prefer a more thematic approach. The following categories may be helpful in reflecting on and organizing how you will share. Do include how God has interacted in your story, and about your relationship with Him.

- Where you are from / Family of Origin
- Defining moments,
- High points, successes, obstacles overcome
- Low points, failures, lessons learned
- What shaped your view of and relationship with God?
- If you have trusted Christ... tell when, how, that took place, and what has changed in your life.
- Where and how have you experienced God since that time?
- Heroes or key people who have shaped your life.

As a co-author with God, only the 2 of you know your story and what is meant to be shared with your group now. There is no way to fail if you are faithful to pray and prepare.

How should I communicate my story?

Just relax and share the highlights. There is no way to lose. You know your story better than any other person. It would be helpful to organize your thoughts on paper, possibly in outline or bullet form. It would also be helpful to have copies of your outline or bullets to share with the group so they can remember and follow along. It would also be helpful to include some prayer request themes, as many in your group will be praying for you.

Have fun. Listen to each other's story with curiosity and with an alertness to see what God has already been doing, and how he may be calling you to come alongside with encouragement!