

# Sharing our stories

***This semester you will be sharing with one another parts of your own story with a hope that this deepens your appreciation of how God has shaped your life story up to this point and where He is leading you.***

## Why share stories?

### ***Sharing stories helps us better know God***

- Through Bible stories, we learn the character of God and his dealings with his people. These stories can also help us explore the issues that God thinks are important for our lives, e.g. Paul encouraged Timothy to pay attention to his life and doctrine (1 Tim 4:16)
- As we share stories, we become more attuned to the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives, and the way God is bringing in His Kingdom through men and women.

### ***Sharing stories helps us better know ourselves***

- As we prepare to tell our stories we become aware of relationships, events and places that God has used to shape who we are.
- We can know God's care for our lives more intimately as we look back at our story.
- Telling our story helps us see where dispositions of character and habitual patterns of behavior (both positive and negative) have developed over long periods of time.

### ***Sharing stories helps us better know one another***

- Sharing stories reminds us that God has created us to live in community with others; to share life with them.
- We can better understand the different ways God's people express their faith
- We can see the effects of both sin and faithfulness in the relationships we have with each other, and within a community.
- By sharing stories, and being vulnerable to others, helps to establish trust and community.

### ***Sharing stories helps us better know the world***

- Sharing stories provides the opportunity to learn about different cultures and ways of life.
- We can see the blessings and the hardships that can be a part of different cultures or areas of the world.
- We can appreciate the richness and variety of God's creation and His world.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR SHARING YOUR STORY**

1. Spend time reflecting through the guidelines on the following pages.
2. Prepare to share your story by choosing 1 or 2 of the main categories outlined (Heritage, Heroes, High Points, Hard Times, Hand of God) to focus on during your sharing. As you share consider the connection between your story and your community and legacy.
3. Talk to your faculty leader if you become aware that there are difficult sections of your story: either topics that you will find hard to share or areas of your life that will be especially confronting for your group. Your faculty leader can help you decide what is appropriate to share and what might be better left unsaid.
4. Prepare to share for no more than 25 minutes, to allow for questions and prayer after your sharing.
5. Communicate clearly, creatively, concisely, honestly. Feel free to bring pictures, objects etc that might help you as you share your story.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR LISTENING TO OTHER'S STORIES**

1. Listen to others attentively, responsively, appreciatively.
2. Maintain confidentiality: this story is theirs to share, not yours.
3. As you listen consider the following questions so that you can pray and respond:
  - a. What were the main themes in the person's story?
  - b. What did you connect with?
  - c. How does their story impact you?
  - d. How can you encourage each other?
  - e. What insight could you bring (make sure that this is not just 'advice giving' and ask for permission to share insights)?

God uses our life experiences to mould and form us. Not all experiences have the same impact; some are so powerful that they tend to “form” us. That is, they impact our lives in some kind of lasting way that changes us. It may be very powerful individual experiences that change us dramatically, or a series of connected experiences that, little by little, change us over the course of months or years.

One way to identify formative experiences is through the fact that God gives you developmental experiences in five primary areas <sup>1</sup>:

## HERITAGE

Heritage is the combined influences from our past that God has used to write our stories, to mould us, and to bring us where we are today.

Ask yourself some questions that may help clarify this area of life:

1. How have my parents, primary caregivers, or siblings significantly influenced my life? What was my early family life like?
2. What impact has my ethnicity and culture had on me? How has God used all of this?
3. What am I gifted in? How has the Holy Spirit uniquely equipped me for life?

## HEROES

Heroes are those people whom God has used to play a part in shaping our character or influencing our direction. Of course, they aren't perfect or have superpowers – but God has made them part of your story for a reason! Clarifying questions:

1. Which people have played a key role in influencing me for good? How have they done so?
2. What have those people imparted to me that I am grateful for?

## HIGH POINTS

High times are those periods in our lives that were especially meaningful in a positive way. Clarifying questions:

1. What was a major event in my past that shaped my identity or my understanding of God in a positive way?
2. What have I done that I am personally proud of, or what accomplishments have been recognized by others (either individually or with others)?
3. How has God used the ‘best times’ in my life to shape or transform me?

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<sup>1</sup> This outline is adapted from the Spiritual Formation and Leadership Leader resource notes for SF 102 at Dallas Theological Seminary

## HARD TIMES

Hard times are those relationships or seasons in our lives that were particularly difficult or painful. Clarifying questions:

1. What has been tough in life? How has that been formative to me?
2. Are there incidents that have happened to me that are difficult to talk about with others? What are they?
3. What have been the worst times for me? Why? What have I endured? What has been (or is now) painful?

## HAND OF GOD

There are the times when God revealed His sovereignty and grace in our lives in a special way. Maybe at a particular time of need God sent just the right person with just the right perspective that enabled us to keep moving ahead in faith. Or perhaps His Word came “alive” to us at a critical point. Clarifying questions:

1. When have I seen God’s sovereignty and grace uniquely evident in my Life Story?
2. What are some specific events that would illustrate this unique work in my life?
3. How has God used His Word as a part of writing my story?

## OTHER IDEAS TO CONSIDER

**COMMUNITY & MISSION** - Consider how your life story fits into and contributes toward the building of community in your sphere of influence. Consider how your individual story fits into God’s larger story, the metanarrative - the overarching story of humankind and salvation history - creation, fall, redemption and finally, new creation.

1. Have you ever experienced a time when you recognised that you were asked to act or given the ability to impact others – ‘for such a time as this’ (Esther 4:14)?
2. Have you been aware of your story being an encouragement/challenge to others who are exploring the Christian faith?
3. What does it mean for you to see your story as part of God’s larger story?

**LEAVING A LEGACY** – looking into the future to consider what legacy you want to leave.

1. What part do you hope to play in God’s transformation of people (and the world!)?
2. Do you feel particularly called to a particular ministry, community, or workplace? How do you hope God will use you in this area?
3. How do you feel about the ministry God is calling you to? Excited? Daunted? Prepared?