

SESSION 4

THE STORIES OF OTHERS

Introduction

Welcome to Session 4 of *Embracing Evangelism*. In this fourth session, we will explore The Stories of Others: why they matter and how to truly receive them and be blessed by them. First, let us open with prayer. *Offer your own prayer here, or use one of the following:*

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of story. Help us to open our hearts and minds to what you would have us learn today, as a group and as individuals. May we learn to hear with your ears, proclaim freedom with your mouth, and bring healing with your hands. Give us the patience we need to listen to others and the courage we need to invite them into your goodness as your Spirit leads. Thank you for this time of learning, may we humbly receive what your Spirit has in store for us. Amen.

Begin the Video

Watch video from start to 13:39. Note these highlights for yourself:

At the heart of our Christian faith is the Great Story, the collection of stories of God's creating, redeeming work in scripture, especially in the story of Jesus. We are all part of this Great Story – all made in God's image, all moving through a world shot through with God. We still need to grow our capacity to seek, name, and celebrate God at work in our own lives.

One-to-One StorySharing is a simple way to open the door to this practice. A One-to-One is an intentional conversation between two people who share and receive each other's stories of what matters most.

You may wonder why we call it *StorySharing* and not *storytelling*? *Storytelling* is used to persuade, to convince, to shape understanding. It is generally one-way and thus can be transactional. *StorySharing* is relational. It is about engaging and creating connections. In the course of StorySharing, we help to form the Beloved Community: a just and compassionate community where we are deeply invested in each other's flourishing.

StorySharing is also not interviewing or pastoral care. In StorySharing, both people share their stories and both discover the blessing of creating a space to receive others' stories. The key word here is *mutuality*. If the sharing is one way – I ask questions and you answer, or you as the expert or caregiver and I am the one with a particular need – then we haven't really formed the basis for life-giving mutual relationship.

In StorySharing, both our stories matter. We both experience the vulnerability of offering a story and the blessing of receiving one.

- *If your group is doing the Exploratory Exercise: Watch until 13:39, which is the end of the explanation of the Exploratory Exercise. Pause the video and lead your group in the exercise and the post-exercise discussion.*

- *If your group is not doing the Exploratory Exercise: Continue watching the video to witness the masterclass group as they try out the exercise.*

Exploratory Exercise: One-to-One StorySharing

We've been practicing with One-to-Ones through most of our sessions together. Now, we're going to do some deeper learning using The Episcopal Church's Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook.

Some of the time, you'll be the one offering your story. Here's what you should keep in mind when sharing:

- Keep it real, sharing real stories from real life.
- Make it vivid and full of all the senses: what you saw, smelled, and tasted; who was there; where you were; what you felt. In other words, re-create the experience.
- Avoid interpreting or reflecting on the experience.
- Notice the beginning, middle, and end of your story, plus points where you made a significant turn or choice.

Sometimes, you'll be the one listening. Here are some points to keep in mind when listening:

- Make sure you're an active, engaged listener.
- Imagine the speaker is revealing something holy.
- Offer generous hospitality. What gestures or quality of presence help you to feel valued? Give that to your partner.
- If there is a pause, ask open-ended questions to help your partner speak freely, and to fully go deeper with their story.
 - "How did that make you feel?" or "What was that like for you?"
 - "I'd like to picture this. What did you see?"
 - "Please, tell me more."
- Ask for follow-up opportunities:
 - "Is there anyone you think would share this passion or concern?"
 - "Would you like to join me for/read this together/check out this podcast/meet this group...?"

This is how we approach both offering and receiving a story.

Now, here are some prompts for sharing stories with each other. *Give one prompt at a time, allowing both parties to share their stories before moving to the next prompt. Allow for 2 minutes per prompt per person.*

- When have you felt connected to a community, humanity, the universe, or something greater than yourself? What was happening?
- Tell me about a time that you felt God really alive (in our church [if appropriate]).
- Tell me about a time that you shared your gifts. What did you do? What made that possible?

Brief Discussion

Pose the following questions to the group:

- How did it feel to share your story?
- How did it feel to listen to the story of another person?
- Where would StorySharing be helpful in your church's life?
- How could you introduce it?
- Where would StorySharing be helpful in your practice of Episcopal Evangelism?

Let's resume the video and see how the *Embracing Evangelism* participants did.

Resume the Video

Watch from 19:09 to 35:53. At that point, pause the video for discussion.

Discussion & Reflection Questions

Use the following reflection questions to guide your discussion. Depending on time, you might choose one or two on which to focus. Encourage participants to reflect on the remaining questions later themselves.

- What is one way you could imagine StorySharing as part of your church's life?
- What is one way you could weave StorySharing into your personal life and practice of evangelism?

Finish the Video

Review the Try It Out section of the Participant Guide (see guide for more detailed instructions). Encourage participants to do the following before the next session:

- Invite a fellow church member, friend, or family member to help you out.
- Explain that you're practicing something called StorySharing and you're genuinely curious about their experiences. Then, offer the time and attention to listen and share with them.

Close with Prayer

In your own words, thank God for being present in each person's life and in the stories shared and for the wonder and joy of discovery of God's presence in other people's stories. Thank God for the holy time of StorySharing with each other. Pray for God's gifts of holy curiosity about others and of ease in sharing our own stories. Thank God for the Great Story of which all people are a part.