

SESSION 3

THE GREAT STORY AND YOUR STORY

Highlights to Remember

Stories are the heart of evangelism, and everybody has one. You don't need a degree or a collar to share your story; you just need to notice the moments when you've experienced God's loving presence in your life and then to use your words – aloud – to share those stories.

Stories are also the heart of faith. Our faith wouldn't exist without stories. There's the story of God, which we discover when we look more deeply at our own lives and the lives of other people, and especially as we dive into scripture. That's where we find the Great Story.

The Old Testament is basically the long, complicated, beautiful, and sometimes disturbing saga of the Hebrew people's stories with God. That Great Story continues into the New Testament, when Jesus starts a new chapter in the story of God's life with us by coming to be among us in the flesh.

It's easy to see just how critical stories were to Jesus' ministry. He used them to teach profound and eternal truths, and he invited people to find a new life – and a new story – by following him.

Each of us knows and treasures parts of this Great Story as our own. Whether through parts of scripture, hymns, liturgy, or the lives of saints and faithful people, each of us has a special way we enter into the Great Story of God and God's people. That's the story we want to invite others into.

Exploratory Exercise: Cardboard Testimonials

For this exercise, each participant will need either a piece of blank cardstock and a marker to write in large, clear letters to share one's own testimony.

During a time of quiet meditation:

- Take a minute to reflect on moment of hardship, struggle, pain, or loss in your life (one that you would willing to share with others).
- Where has God brought you, or at least, where do you see God in the struggle now?

Name the transformation. On one side of the paper, capture the fear, pain, or heartache in a sentence or two. On the other side, capture the healing and resurrection, even if it has only begun. When finished, stand as you are able and walk around silently, pausing to individually show other participants both sides of your paper and to view theirs. Don't tell the story; just acknowledge silently – with a smile, a tear, a hug, a high-five – your shared gratitude at what God has done and is doing.

One-to-One StorySharing

After sharing silently for a minute or two, stop where you are and break into pairs for One-to-One StorySharing. After one partner shares, listen for the signal. At that point, the listener has the opportunity to reflect where he or she saw or heard God in the story. Then, switch roles.

Brief Discussion

- How does it feel to share and receive these testimonies?
- What did you learn about your own story?
- What did you learn about how God works and what God's presence looks like?

Discussion & Reflection Questions

You may not have time to discuss each question in depth, so consider taking time to reflect on these questions yourself.

Think back to when you heard the Great Story of God alive in the world – in scripture, worship, song, conversation, or stories of the lives of followers of Jesus through the ages and today.

Which parts of the story do you treasure? Why?

How would you capture the Great Story of God in relationship to the world?

What's the Good News of God's loving presence?

Think of your own story of faith.

At which moments did you sense God stirring? When did God move or change you?

Who are your faith ancestors and mentors – the people whose faith and lives you admire?

What were their lives like? What was the role of faith in their stories?

Try It Out

Before the next session...

Consider the moments when you felt God show up in your life.

Share the story of one of these moments with someone you know.

If one of your faith ancestors or mentors is living, tell that person what his or her story and faith mean to you.

Notes