



Session Six: Making Sense of Our Story

“In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ...” *1 Peter 3:15*

GOAL

Situating story-telling and witness. Asking, “Why are you a follower of Jesus?”

Practice Review

- Did you get a chance to move in close this week, and LISTEN to a friend or acquaintance?
- Was this someone whom you have already been NOTICING and PRAYING FOR?
- Was this a challenging process? Why?
- What were you hearing from your friend?

Telling Our Stories

Most of us enjoy hearing a good story – or even a bad one, if it draws us in. Just think of an average TV newscast.

- Share, or share about, a recent “*story*” that you heard from a friend, neighbor, or work colleague. What motivated them to tell you that story?

Read/Discover

REASONS WHY WE DON'T TELL OUR STORIES... [RESOURCE #7]

Do you resonate with “the reasons” in this article?

- What about your story would Jesus think is worth telling?
- What has your relationship with Jesus affected in your life?
- What makes you reluctant to tell that story?

Explore

Read through Ephesians 2:1-10

What if telling our stories of God's gift of saving grace in our lives, is part of the “*good works*” that God has prepared in advance for us to do?

Thinking back to Francis Collins from last week. How would Collins answer the question, “*Why are you a follower of Jesus.*”

Activity: Telling your personal story

Let's take a bit of time to reflect on God's work in us...

Working with a partner, write down in point-form notes your own story... (take about 15-20 min)

- In a world of multiple options, what does “good and whole” and “as it should be” look like to you?
- What was preventing that from happening in your life?
- How does following Jesus affect what you believe about the world? About who God is?
- How does the Jesus Story put your world “right?”
- What happened when you began to connect the dots with Jesus?
- What does that look like for you this week?

Back together, reflect for a moment; what was going through your mind as you worked on this? Hang onto these notes, we're going to come back to them over the next few weeks.

Connecting Word and Deed

We want to develop habits and practices that help us to connect our desire to live as godly, loving Christians (deeds) alongside our desire to communicate to others the “*good news*” that we have found in Jesus (words). These practices are spiritual discernment exercises. We need to learn how to pay attention to what God the Holy Spirit is already doing in the lives of the people within our spheres of influence. **Our task is not to “evangelize” our friends; our task is to bear faithful witness as we participate with what God is already doing in their lives.**



The Practice: Listen

We often forget the fact that God gave us two ears and only one mouth for a reason. We are often more eager to talk to someone about Jesus rather than the equally important art of listening to them, in Jesus.

Move in close, lean in and say “How are you?” and actually mean it, and actually wait for a response, and then go as deep as they want to go. This practice promotes other-centred-ness. By listening to their story, by entering in on their terms you are learning that this life is not all about you.

When you listen, try this, listen for the contours of the journey -- which we have been discussing -- in their story.

- o What would good and whole, and “as it should be,” look like according to them?
- o What do you hear of their aching heart? What are they yearning for?
- o How do they describe why they aren’t realizing that? What is broken in them?
- o How are they seeking to solve their discontentment?
- o Does God-language ever show up in their story-telling?

The goal here isn’t to find the weakness in their argument and worldview, it’s to genuinely seek to understand your friend at their deepest levels.

You might want to try creating environments where you as a group create space where you can hear other people’s stories. Groups can host dinner parties and BBQs and invite their small group friends and their friends from other social circles. **We call this *friend-smashing*.** It’s a good practice. The goal is to listen. To host. To open up space in your life to include these others.

Assignment: This week. Move in close with a friend you have been noticing and praying for – lean in and say “*How are you?*” and wait for a response, and then go as deep as they want to go.

Could we have a discussion about hosting a “*friend-mashing*” house party?

Prayer

God of the Universe, who notices us, who draws us to yourself, who listens to us; please give me ears to truly hear the stories of my friends. Father, prompt me this week to listen to my friend _____.
God, as we co-labour together in the life of my friend, will you continue to draw him/her to Jesus, and to the same renewal of spirit that I have found in relationship with You. Amen.

Homework: article, Sheffield/Hirsch, “*What Kind of Witness are you?*” [RESOURCE #8]