



## Session Eight: Making Sense of His Story (2)

“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

*Telling the Jesus Story simply and clearly – answering “What do you believe about Jesus?” in a way that connects with the concerns of my friends.*

### Practice Review

- Did you get a chance to LOVE on someone that you have been LISTENING to?
- What did that look like?
- Was this a challenging process?
- Why? Did you do this yourself, or with another friend?

### Telling Our Stories

- From our work last week, can we recap (without notes) what we settled on as the basics of what someone needs to know about the Jesus Story?
- Have you thought more about your own journey to faith in Jesus? Was understanding the basic Jesus story an important stage in your own process? How long was it between when you understood the basic story, and when you made a decision to act and become a follower of Jesus?

### Activity: Telling the Jesus Story

Much of the content of this session comes from the innovative work of James Choung in *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing*. IVP, 2008. In essence, Choung took the Good News in a Nutshell framework and crafted a story line that made sense to his friends and colleagues. We want to work our way through his story-crafting as an example of how we might “rethink and reconstruct” our sharing of the Jesus Story.

#### TRUE STORY DIAGRAM [RESOURCE #9]

**INTRODUCTION:** WE ARE ACHING FOR SOMETHING BETTER: TAKING STOCK OF OUR WORLD, NEIGHBOURHOOD, SELVES

- WHAT’S OUR WORLD LIKE? WHAT DO YOU SEE ON THE NEWS? [IDENTIFY A CURRENT ISSUE]
- HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS KIND OF WORLD?

NO NORMAL PERSON THINKS SUFFERING, VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION ARE GOOD THINGS. WE ALL ACHE FOR SOMETHING BETTER – A UNIVERSAL ACHE. HUNGER POINTS TO FOOD; THIRST TO WATER – SURVIVAL ADAPTATION. WHAT IF OUR ACHING FOR A BETTER WORLD MEANS THAT SUCH A THING ONCE EXISTED OR WILL ONE DAY EXIST?

#### PART 1: GOD INTENDED FOR GOOD: GOD’S GOOD INTENTION (A KINGDOM OF SHALOM, UNDER HIS REIGN)

IN THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES, GOD CREATED A GOOD, WONDERFUL WORLD. IN THE BEGINNING, EVERYTHING WAS RIGHT WITH EVERYTHING ELSE. CREATION WAS INTENDED TO TAKE CARE OF US, AND WE WERE INTENDED TO TAKE CARE OF CREATION – AN INTERDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENT. [GENDER, FOOD SECURITY, ETC.]

ON A RELATIONAL LEVEL, HUMANS WERE INTENDED FOR COMMUNITY; MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY. WHOLE INTEGRATED PEOPLE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER WHOLE INTEGRATED PEOPLE.

ON A PERSONAL LEVEL WE WERE EACH INTENDED TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, A RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE AND INTIMACY. GOD HUNG OUT WITH US, AND WE LIKED BEING WITH HIM. WE WERE MEANT TO LOVE AND BLESS EACH OTHER AS WELL.

THE WORLD AND ALL THAT WAS IN IT REALLY WAS INTENDED FOR GOOD.

- BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THIS GOOD WORLD? HOW DID WE GET TO WHERE WE ARE TODAY?

## **PART 2: WE ARE DAMAGED BY SELF-CENTEREDNESS: FALLING SHORT OF GOD'S INTENTIONS**

WHEN GOD WAS IN CHARGE, WE HAD A GOOD WORLD, AS GOD INTENDED. BUT WE WANTED TO BE IN CHARGE, SO THAT ALL OF IT – CREATION AND EVERYONE IN IT – COULD BE USED FOR OUR OWN BENEFIT INSTEAD OF THE INTENDED PURPOSE OF SERVING EACH OTHER. IT BECAME ALL ABOUT US – ME – SELF-FOCUSED, SELF-CENTERED.

ON A BIGGER LEVEL, WE DAMAGED CREATION AS IT WAS INTENDED. THE PLANET – OIL, POLLUTANTS – IT FIGHTS BACK – HURRICANES, TSUNAMIS. THOSE BIG, GLOBAL FACTORS OF EXPLOITATION FACTOR INTO RACISM, SEXISM, SLAVERY, CORRUPTION, INJUSTICE – ALL ISSUES THAT DAMAGE THE WORLD BUT ALSO INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES.

ON A RELATIONAL LEVEL WE DAMAGE EACH OTHER AND OTHERS HURT US – WHETHER WE MEAN TO OR NOT. WHEN WE LIVE FOR OURSELVES IT'S EASY TO TAKE AND GAIN, WITHOUT REGARD FOR OTHER PEOPLE. OUR INTENDED INTERDEPENDENCE AS HUMANS IS DISTORTED, BROKEN.

ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, THIS SELF-CENTEREDNESS DAMAGES OUR SOULS AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH GOD NOW, MAYBE WE ARE EVEN AFRAID; AT THE LEAST WE IGNORE GOD AND LIVE FOR OURSELVES. AT THE SAME TIME WE RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE HURTING OURSELVES WITH THIS SELF-CENTEREDNESS – AND THAT WE WILL LIKELY NEVER BE THE KIND OF PEOPLE WE WANT TO BE.

ALL OF IT/US – WE ARE DAMAGED/DISTORTED BY THIS FUNDAMENTAL SELF-CENTEREDNESS.

- CAN YOU IDENTIFY WHERE YOU HAVE SEEN DAMAGE IN YOUR OWN LIFE OR THE LIVES OF OTHERS AROUND YOU?

## **PART 3: GOD IS RESTORING GOD'S GOOD INTENTION: THE INCARNATION**

BUT THE CHRISTIAN STORY TELLS US THAT GOD LOVES THE WORLD/US TOO MUCH TO LEAVE IT THAT WAY. GOD CAME TO THE PLANET AS JESUS 2000 YEARS AGO AND STARTED SOMETHING NEW. HE STARTED A RESISTANCE MOVEMENT AGAINST THIS SELF-CENTEREDNESS. HE LIVED AND TAUGHT A BETTER WAY, BUT HE ALSO OFFERED HIS OWN LIFE AS THE ULTIMATE OTHER-ORIENTATION.

IN ESSENCE JESUS BREAKS INTO THE MIDST OF OUR SELF-CENTEREDNESS (OUR OWN INFECTIOUS DISEASE) AND TAKES IT UPON HIMSELF IN HIS DEATH – AN ACT PERPETRATED BY THE SELFISHNESS OF THOSE IN POWER AT THAT TIME. BUT HE COMES BACK TO LIFE – IS RESURRECTED BY GOD – OVERCOMING THE DISEASE AND, IN ESSENCE, OFFERS HIS IMMUNITY TO US. AS WE ENTER INTO LIFE WITH HIM, JESUS' GOODNESS OVERCOMES THE SELFISHNESS AND DAMAGE IN US AND IN OUR WORLD AROUND US.

HIS GOAL WAS/IS TO RESTORE GOD'S ORIGINAL GOOD INTENTIONS FOR US AND THE WORLD GOD INTENDED. THIS PROFOUND RESTORATION OF OUR SOULS GIVES US THE POSSIBILITY OF NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT THE EARTH AND OUR RELATIONSHIP TO IT.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, WHETHER FAMILY, FRIENDS, NEIGHBOURS OR WORK COLLEAGUES CAN HAPPEN ON A NEW LEVEL AS WELL. THE KEY IS OUR WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE AND RECONCILE, KNOWING THAT JESUS HAS FORGIVEN US FOR THE WAYS WE'VE HURT EACH OTHER AND, ULTIMATELY HIM.

FINALLY, GOD RESTORED OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIMSELF. WE DON'T HAVE TO LIVE SELF-CENTERED LIVES OR BE AFRAID OF GOD ANYMORE. WE DON'T HAVE TO LIVE CONTINUALLY IN CONFLICT WITH OURSELVES AND GOD'S INTENTIONS FOR US. THAT OLD SELF DIES WITH JESUS AND A NEW SELF RISES WITH JESUS. WE START TO LIVE IN A NEW WAY AS JESUS DID, LETTING HIM TAKE CHARGE.

THE REVOLUTION, THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT, AGAINST SELF-INTEREST HAS BEGUN AND WE ARE ALL INVITED.

#### PART FOUR: WE ARE SENT TOGETHER TO HEAL

SO JESUS WANTS US TO JOIN THIS RESISTANCE MOVEMENT AGAINST SELFISHNESS/SELF-CENTEREDNESS, AND TO ACTIVELY ENGAGE IN HEALING HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS, MAYBE EVEN THE PLANET!

ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, WE'RE CALLED TO GIVE OURSELVES OVER TO JESUS' LEADERSHIP AND BECOME MORE LIKE HIM. IF WE WANT TO BECOME THE KIND OF GOOD WE WANT TO SEE IN THE WORLD, WE NEED TO ADMIT TO OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE DAMAGE WE SEE AROUND US. WE LET JESUS TAKE CHARGE OF OUR LIVES; WE PUT OUR TRUST IN HIM. OUR 'SELVES' ARE REMOVED FROM THE CENTRE AND JESUS IS PLACED AT THE CENTRE.

ENTERING INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS REQUIRES ENTERING INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS WHO HAVE ALSO PUT JESUS AT THE CENTRE OF THEIR LIVES. IN THIS INTERPLAY WITH OTHER PEOPLE WE ARE SEEKING TO DISPLACE SELF AND THAT WILL REQUIRE ONGOING HEALING AND RESTORATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRACTICES THAT AID FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION.

OUR INVOLVEMENT TOGETHER AS COMMUNITIES OF PEOPLE WHO ARE BEING RESTORED BY GOD WILL INVOLVE PARTICIPATING IN THE HEALING OF SYSTEMS OF INJUSTICE IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND THE WORLD BEYOND.

## Explore

It may be true then, that words do not always express the fullness of what we know; they may even at times betray, reduce, or distort what we know. But it is also the case that words reveal what we might otherwise prefer to hide or neglect in a world that has taught us to fear our own convictions. Proclamation is one of the most important ways we become *"witnesses."* (Bryan Stone 2007, 250)

### Video clip: *James Choung*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCVcSiUUMhY>

Let's join James in diagramming for ourselves, as we watch again.

- Does this story do justice to your understanding of the Christian faith? Of your relationship with Jesus?
- Is it worth taking the time to be able to tell this story, given an inquiry from a friend?

[The goal is not to memorize in this session, but to give a basic operational connection to this form of story-telling. Individuals can do more work on it themselves, personally, or, the group can decide to actually work deeper on practicing this story form as an appropriate aid for their own faith-sharing.]

### 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: Love

Now if you are out there noticing people, engaging in unauthorized prayer, listening to people and their stories, something is going to happen to your heart. Look out. The fact that you have the God of love living his life in you, and now you are bringing your life into dangerously close contact with other people - you might find yourself loving people deeply. Don't be alarmed. Let it happen.

- **Love them with all you got** and of course be deliberate about looking for opportunities to put this feeling into action.
- You'll want to consider how you can be of benefit to them in their life. Find ways to serve them. Find ways to let them know you care about them. Practice real and deep loving, as an intentional, active thing.

**Assignment:** Move in close with a friend you have been noticing, praying for, and listening to. Can you identify a practical way to “love on” them? Will you act on that this week? Is there a way other members of this group could help you with that?

How's it going with the idea of hosting a “*friend-mashing*” dinner/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, help me to find a practical way to love 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:** READ THE ARTICLE FROM CT ABOUT KIRSTEN POWER'S JOURNEY TO FAITH IN JESUS. [RESOURCE #10]