



## Session Nine: Making Sense of Their 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*

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### GOAL

*Connecting their story to His story. The Jesus story is not an abstract religious myth, but a real story intended to connect with our real stories.*

### 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 work on this yourself, or with another friend?

### Telling Our Stories

We have now been intentionally Noticing, Praying for and Listening in with our friends and acquaintances for a couple months.

- Can you identify some of the themes in their lives and stories that keep coming up?
- Is anyone asking you about your life, your contentment, your joy? What do you say?
- If no one's asking, what's that about? Their self-centeredness? Me, not “being” hopeful, content, joy-filled?

### Discover

We read Kirsten Power's story of her faith journey.

- Thinking of the Engel Scale; can you place Kirsten's story at different points along that progression?
- Going back to the True Story outline; can you identify where Kirsten mentions parts of the Story she had to come to terms with?
- Do some of her pre-conversion concerns resonate with things you hear from your friends, or in the stories you have been LISTENING in to during these weeks?

Kirsten's story was published in a Christian magazine. Let's listen to how she talks to her peers and work colleagues.

**Video clip:** *Kirsten Power interview on Media Buzz*

What strikes you about Kirsten's responses to the interviewer?

“Listening is a rare happening among human beings. You cannot listen to the word another is speaking if you are preoccupied with your appearance or impressing the other; or if you are trying to decide what you are going to say when the other stops talking, or if you are debating about whether the word being spoken is true or relevant or agreeable. Such matters may have their place, but only after listening to the word as the word is being uttered. Listening, in other words, is a primitive act of love, in which a person gives self to another's word, making self accessible and vulnerable to that word.” *William Stringfellow*

## Explore

### Read Acts 10:23b-48, Peter in the home of Cornelius

- Why did Peter go to Cornelius' house?
- In verse 29, Peter says "May I ask why you sent for me?" and then he listens to Cornelius talk. How does Peter respond after listening to Cornelius?
- How is Peter's version of the Jesus Story different, here, compared to his message in Acts 2?

### What are you hearing from the people God has connected you with?

- #1 what would good and whole, and "as it should be," look like, according to your friends?
- #2 What do you hear of their aching heart? What are they yearning for?  
How do they describe why they aren't realizing that? What is broken in them?  
How are they seeking to solve their discontentment?
- #3 Does God-language ever show up in their story-telling? What do they know about the Jesus Story?
- #4 Do they have a community of healing in their lives?

Often people are falling short of their best intentions or desires, and that comes out in various ways in our conversations with people. What if we had a simple inquiry question in our back pocket: "*What is it that you are looking for, hoping for?*" Then, "*Why? Why does that matter so much to you?*"

### Common Refrains

These are some common refrains from people about their situations, in response to a question like that. Can you imagine a Good News/Jesus Story response to these statements? [group exercise]

1. I am just trying to keep it all together; if I don't it's all going to fall apart. (I need to figure out how to get control) I feel anxious and fearful about my life situation, about the future
2. I'm afraid of what people will think; I'm looking for approval; I always feel like I have to match up to other people, or reach a certain standard
3. I keep being disappointed by people (spouse, family, friends, boss, politicians, even Christians); are there any good people out there?
4. I feel ashamed of things that I have done, that I can never get past them; they keep dragging me down.
5. Well, there's got to be more than this, right? Life's good, in many ways, but there's always this feeling of emptiness in the pit of my stomach.

But is there an earlier starting point in our everyday conversations?

**Can we turn confirmation into reinterpretation?** Often people are looking for their interpretations to be confirmed. They make a statement about some situation, and invite a response: "you know what I mean?" or "isn't that right?" Do we have a good news response that might allow for a moment of reflection, or "Oh I hadn't thought about it that way."

**Can we turn advice into influence?** We all look for input from others, for advice. The advice of others is most people's primary source of ideas and influence. A decision or choice has to be made, and they ask: "What would you do?" or "What do you think?" Do we have a good news response that asks the "What?" and "Why?" questions?

**Can we turn complaint into lament?** A common conversation form is moaning, complaining. Rather than viewing complaint as negative and to be avoided, what if complaint is just recognition of a broken world? Lament is acknowledgment of the broken circumstances, while trusting, imagining something better. Could we find a good news response that accepts complaint and imagines an alternative?

**Can we turn anecdotes into good news stories?** When people get together they tell snippets of their day, week as a way of filling conversation space. Not grand narratives, just a short incident, with an expression of how it impacted them. Could we tell a short story that starts, “wow, I had a similar situation the other day, and...” we just insert how our perspective might take us in a different direction.

**Video clip:** *Jared Siebert’s Making Sense Story*

### 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: Tell your story

The goal here is to not to intellectually tear them a new one. It’s NOT to find just the right arguments to pound them into the dirt. It’s NOT even to tell the Big Story of the universe and everything. The goal is to talk about you. To tell your story. (Look back at Session 6)

- Talk about how God made peace with you. Nothing fancy.
- Some of us have never thought much about our own story. Now is the time to start giving it some thought. This practice promotes gratitude in you by becoming aware of the many ways God has been present in your life.

**Assignment:** In the course of LISTENING to your friends and LOVING them, an opportunity may emerge to share your personal story of coming to faith (like Kirsten shared hers). You don’t have to “tell the Gospel in a nutshell” – leave that for another day – just TELL your story.

### 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 the space to share my story with 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:** “BELONG, BELIEVE” BY STUART MURRAY [RESOURCE #11]

Go back to your Personal Story. Reflect on the connection points between your friend’s story and your own. Continue to develop your Personal Story for sharing with the group in Session 11.