

4. sharing stories

We all long to be known and loved. If someone professes loves for us but doesn't know us, then it feels cheap. If they know us but don't love us, then it's hurtful. But to be known and loved is the key to genuine, healthy relationships.

This week, we're going to look at why and how to share our stories. Then everyone will take some time to prepare to share a 10- to 15-minute version of their story next week.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Your story is what has shaped your beliefs about God, the world, and yourself. The themes that dominate our stories will often be patterns for how we define ourselves and view our relationship to God. Knowing the events and relationships that have shaped our lives will help us know and understand one another.

The best part is that God is the master storyteller. He is driving the whole narrative of creation to an exciting conclusion where sin, Satan, and death are removed forever and Jesus is glorified over a fully renewed creation. And he's weaving your story into that master narrative.

As we get to know one another's stories, we are invited to participate in God's work of making those stories new. We love one another by participating in the new parts of the narrative where Jesus is bringing conviction, healing, peace, and hope to us day-by-day.

Telling others about your life may stretch your vulnerability. That's okay! Maybe this whole idea freaks you out a little bit. That's okay, too! Simply begin your story by sharing what you're experiencing. You could say, "I don't like talking about myself, so this is hard for me," or "I'm going to give the overview, but there are things in my story I'm not ready to share." This will help your group listen, pray, and love you better.

LISTENING

For many of us, listening to stories can be almost as difficult as sharing them. Our first inclination will be to make someone else's story about us by relating it to our own stories or responding out of our own discomfort. The most important thing to remember as you listen to the stories of others is that their story isn't about you, it's about what God has done and is doing in them. Jesus is the hero of our stories.

After someone shares, reflect back one detail, event, or emotion that seemed important to them. "Reflecting" is part of listening: it can be as simple as repeating back key things you heard, or summarizing something that was said in a way that honors the other person's experience. Doing this shows others you are listening and invites connection.

After one or two people reflect what they heard, ask, "How can we pray for you and how can we be a support to you in the future?" Then pray before the next person shares.

STORY GROUPS

If your group is larger than eight people, have everyone break into smaller groups (three to four). These will be your "story groups." Once you have established story groups, everyone should still make efforts to hear the stories of those in other story groups. For example, you could invite three or four people over for brunch or dessert to share stories and pray. As more people join your group in the future, find ways to share stories with them as well.

Story groups are not the only way to share our stories. We have provided group leaders with a primer including other possible approaches, but if you have a suggested approach of your own, feel free to share it

with the group.

SCRIPTURE & DISCUSSION

Read *Acts 22:3-21*. How does Paul's example help us think about telling our stories?

EXERCISE

Together (or in story groups), look over the templates in the appendix at the end of this guide offering some different approaches you can take to telling your story. Talk about any nervousness or excitement you're feeling, then pray for one another.

Take time to prepare for sharing a 10- to 15-minute version of your story.

PRAYER

Pray for God to knit you together in his love.

SHARING

If there's time, start sharing your stories (if anyone feels ready). Conclude at your agreed-upon time by giving thanks for how Jesus has revealed himself in our stories. It's okay if only a story or two is shared: you will continue sharing next week.

Take the entirety of your next session to continue sharing, making sure everyone tells their story.

JESUS IS THE HERO OF OUR STORIES

We recommend reading the following aloud after everyone in the group has shared:

Everyone (at this table / in this room) has a story that shapes our beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. God has invited us to share in his work of redeeming our stories and reshaping us. Let's keep these things in mind as we learn together what it means that we are a family of disciples on mission with Jesus:

All of us have joy, pain, disappointment, and hope mixed into our stories. But Jesus has stepped in and begun to unite us with his greater story of redemption in all the earth. Our greatest life-pivoting moment was when we were amazed by grace and turned from our sin to follow Jesus.

He is the hero of our stories. He is the hope we look forward to. He has filled us with his Holy Spirit to learn how to love God, one another, and our city. Let's pray that God will help us know his love in a way that brings us healing, joy, freedom, and hope.

APPENDIX 3

sharing your story: dynamic plot

In the beginning... Where did you grow up? What is an example of what it was like growing up in your home? Did the spiritual temperature encourage rule-keeping or recklessness?

Which led to... How did your home dynamics, or perhaps a shift in them, shape your view of yourself? How did that manifest in your attitudes and behaviors? What was the fruit of those attitudes and behaviors?

But God... What set you on your current trajectory? What was the event that brought you to where you are now? How did that speak into or modify your previous understandings of yourself?

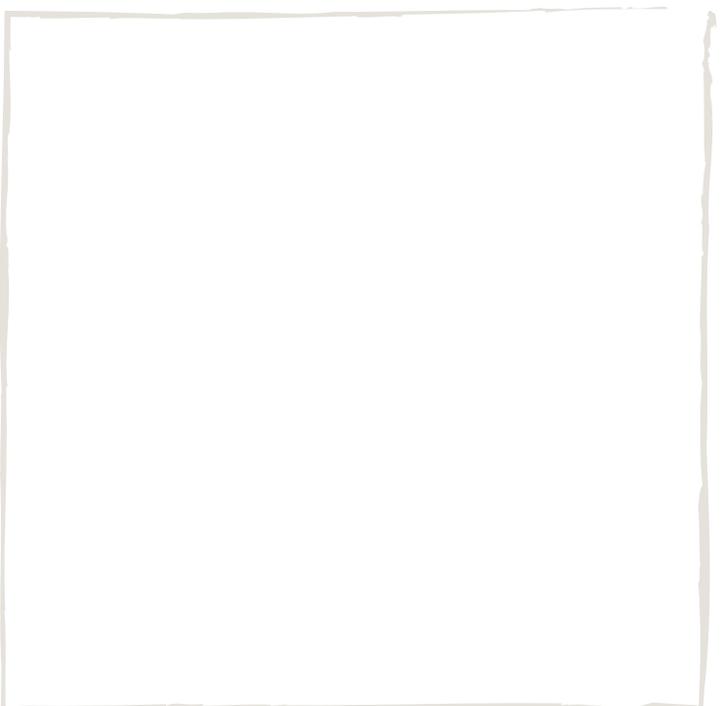
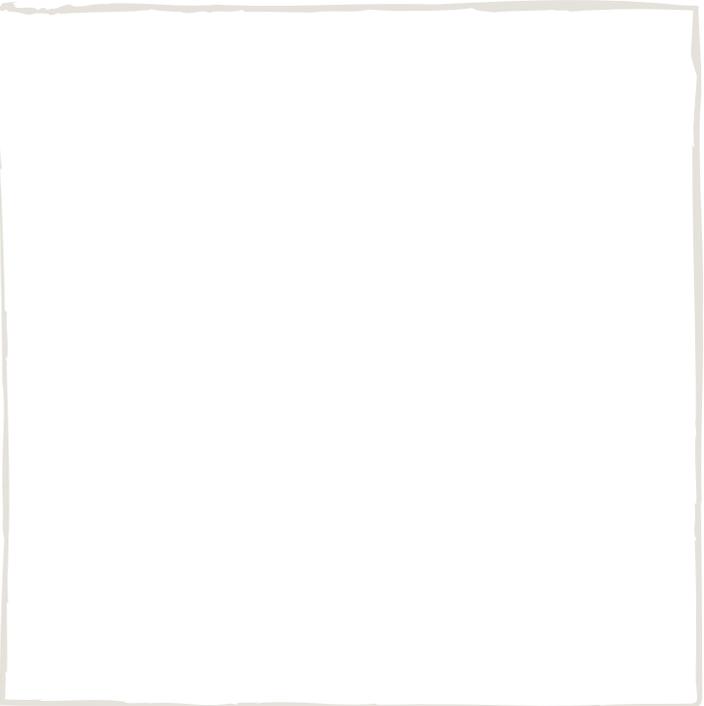
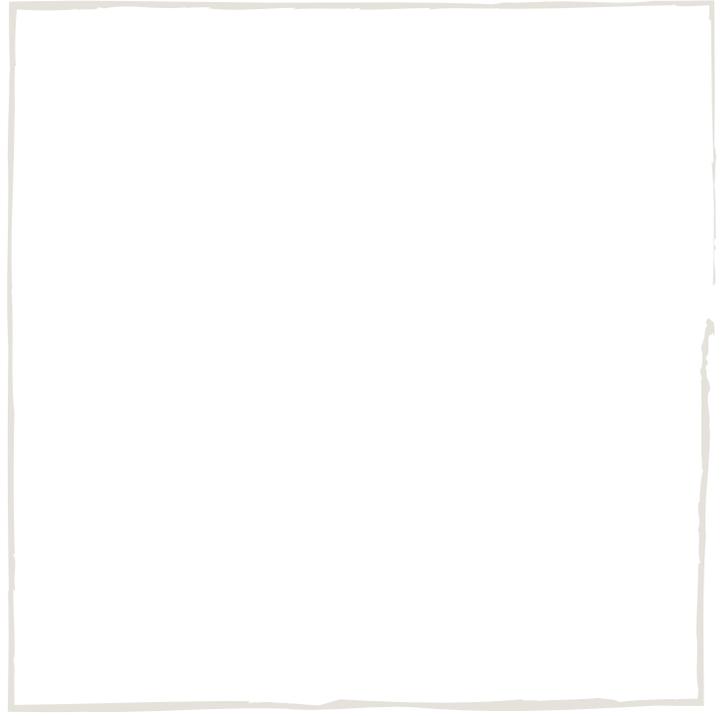
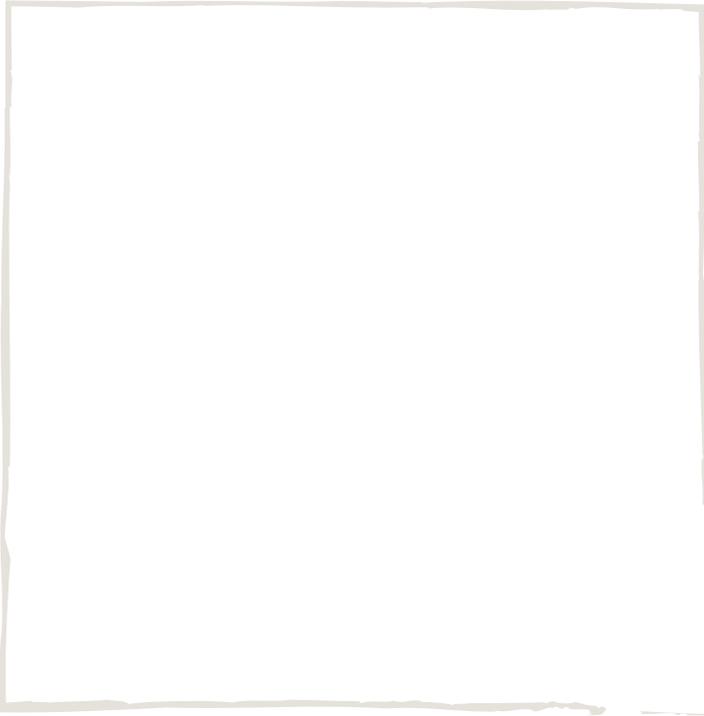
What I hope for... What struggles are you still wrestling with? What future are you longing for or working toward?

Sharing the emotional impact of these events and relationships can be difficult. Check the next appendix for a list of emotion words to help you articulate your experience.

sharing your story: instastories

The four frames below represent four stages of your life. Draw still-frame pictures capturing the essence of each stage or event in your life. Prepare to share each image with your community, explaining why those moments or seasons were shaping for your understanding of God, yourself, and others.

Sharing the emotional impact of these events and relationships can be difficult. Check the next appendix for a list of emotion words to help you articulate your experience.



sharing your story: timeline

Take 10-15 minutes to create a timeline of your life that includes the following elements of your story. Feel free to make an actual timeline that helps you communicate your story. It can be drawn as a line on paper with dates, events, and doodles or be a bulleted list for you to read to your group. Do whatever helps you share.

After making your timeline, plan to share with your group for about 15 minutes. This obviously isn't enough time to cover your whole story, but it will be enough to let the members of your group know you better.

Sharing the emotional impact of these events and relationships can be difficult. Check the next appendix for a list of emotion words to help you articulate your experience.

HEROES

Share two people who have had a great positive impact on you. These could be parents, teachers, mentors, or others who shaped and inspired you.

HIGH POINTS

Share one or two great moments in your life that have shaped you. These could be events, achievements, or seasons of blessing.

HARD TIMES

Hard times may be particularly painful events or seasons of life that were marked by ongoing difficulty. Share one or two of the struggles that have shaped you.

HOPES

Each of us has things we're looking forward to in the future, or at least hoping will come to fruition. Share a hope you are currently holding.

APPENDIX 4

emotion words

Emotions are natural, internal responses to our circumstances. All of us have them. We even have emotions about our emotions. Sometimes sharing them with others can be complex. We hope this list of emotion words will help you express yourself as you share your story, talk about expectations, pray, and worship with your community.

<u>ANGER</u>	<u>SADNESS</u>	<u>JOY</u>	<u>FEAR</u>	<u>CONFUSION</u>	<u>SHAME</u>	<u>LONELINESS</u>
Bothered	Down	Secure	Uneasy	Uncertain	Awkward	Out of place
Irritated	Somber	Content	Apprehensive	Unsettled	Self-conscious	Disconnected
Displeased	Hurt	Satisfied	Hesitant	Perplexed	Embarrassed	Cut off
Annoyed	Disappointed	Refreshed	Anxious	Flustered	Sorry	Insignificant
Frustrated	Mournful	Encouraged	Distressed	Dazed	Remorseful	Neglected
Fuming	Grieved	Thrilled	Afraid	Bewildered	Ashamed	Removed
Irate	Crushed	Elated	Overwhelmed	Lost	Belittled	Isolated
Outraged	Empty	Overjoyed	Terrified	Baffled	Violated	Abandoned
Furious	Despairing	Ecstatic	Numb	Blindsided	Degraded	Forsaken