

SESSION 4

THE STORIES OF OTHERS

In this fourth session, we will explore The Stories of Others: why they matter and how to truly receive them and be blessed by them. First, let us open with prayer.

Highlights to Remember

At the heart of our Christian faith is the Great Story, the collection of stories of God's creating, redeeming work in scripture, especially in the story of Jesus. We are all part of this Great Story – all made in God's image, all moving through a world shot through with God. We still need to grow our capacity to seek, name, and celebrate God at work in our own lives.

One-to-One StorySharing is a simple way to open the door to this practice. A One-to-One is an intentional conversation between two people who share and receive each other's stories of what matters most.

You may wonder why we call it *StorySharing* and not *storytelling*? *Storytelling* is used to persuade, to convince, to shape understanding. It is generally one-way and thus can be transactional. *StorySharing* is relational. It is about engaging and creating connections. In the course of StorySharing, we help to form the Beloved Community: a just and compassionate community where we are deeply invested in each other's flourishing.

StorySharing is also not interviewing or pastoral care. In StorySharing, both people share their stories and both discover the blessing of creating a space to receive others' stories. The key word here is *mutuality*. If the sharing is one way – I ask questions and you answer, or you as the expert or caregiver and I am the one with a particular need – then we haven't really formed the basis for life-giving mutual relationship.

In StorySharing, both our stories matter. We both experience the vulnerability of offering a story and the blessing of receiving one.

Exploratory Exercise: One-to-One StorySharing

Lessons from The Episcopal Church's *Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook*:

Some of the time, you'll be the one offering your story. Here's what you should keep in mind when sharing:

- Keep it real, sharing real stories from real life.
- Make it vivid and full of all the senses: what you saw, smelled, and tasted; who was there; where you were; what you felt. In other words, re-create the experience.
- Avoid interpreting or reflecting on the experience.
- Notice the beginning, middle, and end of your story, plus points where you made a significant turn or choice.

Sometimes, you'll be the one listening. Here are some points to keep in mind when listening:

- Make sure you're an active, engaged listener.
- Imagine the speaker is revealing something holy.
- Offer generous hospitality. What gestures or quality of presence help you to feel valued? Give that to your partner.

- If there is a pause, ask open-ended questions to help your partner speak freely, and to fully go deeper with their story.
 - “How did that make you feel?” or “What was that like for you?”
 - “I’d like to picture this. What did you see?”
 - “Please, tell me more.”
- Ask for follow-up opportunities:
 - “Is there anyone you think would share this passion or concern?”
 - “Would you like to join me for/read this together/check out this podcast/meet this group...?”

StorySharing Prompts for This Session:

- When have you felt connected to a community, humanity, the universe, or something greater than yourself? What was happening?
- Tell me about a time that you felt God really alive (in our church [if appropriate]).
- Tell me about a time that you shared your gifts. What did you do? What made that possible?

Brief Discussion

- How did it feel to share your story?
- How did it feel to listen to the story of another person?
- Where would StorySharing be helpful in your church’s life?
- How could you introduce it?
- Where would StorySharing be helpful in your practice of Episcopal Evangelism?

Discussion & Reflection Questions

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

What is one way you could imagine StorySharing as part of your church’s life?

What is one way you could weave StorySharing into your personal life and practice of evangelism?

Try It Out

Before the next session...

Invite a fellow church member, a friend, or a family member to help you out. Explain that you’re practicing something called StorySharing. Communicate that you’re genuinely curious about that person’s own experiences and that you would like to share your experiences as well. Then, offer the time and attention to listen and share.

Examples:

- Peace of heart and mind comes from a power greater than ourselves. Share about a time when you have felt the peace of Christ. Ask another what helps that person to find peace of heart and mind.
- No person ever amounts to much until he or she learns to appreciate his or her origins. Share a story about the first person that took you to church or significantly informed your faith. Ask another about his or her faith origins.
- Share a story about a time someone made you feel loved. How did that impact you? Ask for another to share his or her own story of feeling loved.

Notes