

Session: Storytelling

Description

Hospitality is something we can offer both friends and strangers. For about five years I worked at a large church running several ministries including a food bank and a clothing bank. There was a large homeless population in the area and over time, I became friends with some folks who live outdoors.

I must admit that I made decisions about who they were long before ever meeting them. Over time, I realized that I was using the context of my own story, my history, my family, my culture to decide who they were rather than opening my mind to the possibility that they might surprise me. Almost without exception they did.

There's a difference between pulling someone up, pushing someone up, or simply walking beside them. Hospitality is about walking together side by side, sharing life and sharing our stories.

Ben was one of my friends who lives outdoors. When I met him, I assumed he was just another homeless person, maybe dealing with mental illness or addiction. After developing a relationship with him I learned that he had a strong faith in Jesus, AND he had the means to live in a home. I was surprised to learn that he chose to be homeless in order to help other homeless people get clean and sober the way someone had done for him. His community trusted him because they all lived in the woods together. One by one he was helping people get the help they needed. I would never have learned Ben's story had I not asked him.

When we look at people, do we see data points? In a book called *The Social Animal*, the author David Brooks uses the example of chess masters. When an average player sees a chess board, they see only individual pieces. When a chess master looks at a board, she sees words, paragraphs and stories (formations). Master chess players know that it isn't about accumulating a bunch of little facts, it's about connecting relationships between those facts to form a story.

When we meet someone new, do we look at data points? Homeless. Dirty. Begging. Keeping "bad" company. Or do we walk alongside them, allowing ourselves to see that the parts become a whole and the whole become a human being who, just like you, has a story to be told. Sometimes we need a little imagination.

In this session we are going explore storytelling! Your family will have the opportunity to use their imaginations to create stories. Just as it's important to learn how share our own story (which we will do in a later session), it's equally important to learn to open our minds, listen and hear the stories of others. Nonjudgmental listening and imagination take practice! Here you will get a chance to do just that.

Materials Needed

A jar or container of some type. Clean paper, scissors and a few writing utensils.

Handouts

Sample Storytelling Ideas List

What are our family's core values?

Read aloud the quote or scripture

"If I had an ear 2 confide in, I would cry among my treasured friends. But who do u know that stops that long to help another carry on. The world moves fast and it would rather pass u by than 2 stop and c what makes u cry" — Tupac Shakur, [*The Rose That Grew from Concrete*](#)

Questions for discussion (10 minutes)

1. Have you ever been surprised by someone's story? Explain. Have you ever decided who someone was and then found out later that you were wrong? Explain.
 2. Do you think God cares about our stories? Why or why not? Do you think God plays a role in our stories? Why or why not?
 3. What does listening to someone's story have to do with hospitality? How does sharing stories connect people?
 4. Jesus used stories to share principles like forgiveness, good stewardship, kindness. Why do you think he used stories to teach these lessons?
 5. If you heard the life-story of a person from Ethiopia, one from Manhattan NY and one from Siberia, what are some of the themes that their stories might have in common? If you made a list of the commonalities and the differences which would be longer? Which seem more superficial, the commonalities or the differences?
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Rule of life activity

Jar of stories

1. In this activity, you are going to use your imaginations to make up a story.
 2. As a family, discuss the idea that sometimes, if we really listen to people, their stories are not what we expected. We can be surprised! We tend to interrupt, or we are thinking of what we want to say next instead of really listening to their story with an open heart and mind.
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3. In this session, you are going to practice listening and using your imaginations. (In a later session you'll practice listening to real stories.)
4. Get a clear glass jar or container. It needs to be one that you can stick your hand in.
5. Cut paper into 20 individual strips (2" x 11" so there is room to write a sentence)
6. Now, using the handout "Sample Story Starters" to get you started, write one story-starter on each strip of paper. You can cut out the examples or create your own.
7. Fold them in half and put the story-starters in the jar. Shake or mix them up.
8. Say, "We are going to tell a story". One at a time, each person will pull one story-starter out of the jar and read it aloud. For littles, someone can read it for them.
9. Read the story starter and then say, "What happens next?". Now be quiet and listen. Give the person time to think and respond. If the storyteller gets stuck, you might ask:
 - a. How does he feel?
 - b. Then what happens?
 - c. What should she do to fix that problem?
10. Each person can either tell the whole story, or they can start the story, and then you can go around the circle with each person adding to it until you decide the story is complete. If you get stuck, you can pull another story-starter out of the jar and keep the story going.
11. When one story is complete, draw another story-starter out of the jar and repeat until you are ready to stop.

Examen

How did it go? Debrief highs and lows

1. Each person shares their favorite part of the conversation / activity and why.
 2. Each person shares their least favorite part and why.
 3. Did you do a Serving/Giving activity last week? How did it go?
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Serving /giving ideas for any time this week: Choose one or create your own. These can be done individually or as a group. You will be sharing your serving experience in the next session.

- Ask someone new to share their story with you and listen without interrupting.
- Volunteer at a women's shelter or homeless shelter. Ask a staff-member to share one of the guest's stories with you or talk with one of the guests there.
- Purchase a warm sleeping bag and leave it in an area where you know people are living outdoors.
- The next time you go to a restaurant, purchase an extra meal (to go) and when you leave, give the meal (make sure to get utensils) to a neighbor or someone who might like a hot meal.
- Volunteer at a local retirement home and ask one of the residents to share their story with you.