

08.21.11

Sharing Our Stories

Please remember that this week is the stagger week so that all campuses and all CG's can get onto the same study schedule. Next week the guide will cover the passage that was preached live on Sunday, 8/21, at Raleigh West Campus.

At our most recent Community Group Sync, the Leaders and Coaches discussed in greater detail the value of sharing our stories with one another in Christian community. This guide gives a brief recap of that teaching and encourages you to find a way to share your stories with one another in your groups. Here goes . . .

A story reveals details about the characters involved, and it gives context for those characters' lives. God is knowable, and He desires for us to know Him and to be in relationship with Him. Being made in His image, we too are knowable, and a large part of our knowing and being known by one another comes through hearing one another's stories.

Through God's story in the Bible, we see that His is light, life, righteous, pursuant, holy, patient, loving, and that He is King. We even see His divine attributes and eternal nature in His creation story (Romans 1:20). In hearing one another's stories as people, we see even more clearly our need for Him as we better understand 1) our sin apart from Him, and 2) what He has done for us as our God. Practically speaking, as we hear one another's stories, we gain a much greater context for how and why we make the decisions we make, and we get a glimpse into the events and decisions that have shaped our ways of thinking and our preferences. As Leaders and Coaches, this gives us an amazing window into the lives of those in our stead, allowing us to illuminate for one another motivations, sin, or healthy evidence of Spiritual change that we would miss if we were to limit ourselves to self-examination. Knowing one another's stories also provides rich opportunities to demonstrate grace as we see people's sin and often see ourselves in THEIR stories! And let's face it, any opportunity to demonstrate and show grace is a good one. Knowing one another's stories allows us to choose our words to accurately deliver a pointed message, being sensitive to our audience. Paul repeatedly contextualized his message to the Gentiles, and we may do the same in love with one another. Additionally, knowing one another's stories opens the door for us to bear one another's burdens much more specifically, as we often hear through story the origin, nature, and depth of the burdens in question.

All of this is practical, and if this was all there was to storytelling, it would be useful, no doubt. But the fact of the matter is that there is more, much more, to the idea of sharing our stories with one another. When I tell the story of my life, the common character is me. I'm in every part of it, and that's useful for the person who's seeking to care for and get to know me. And yet there's another character who is also involved: God. God is more woven into our stories than we are, in fact, especially when we consider that our very existence and our sustenance depend on Jesus Himself (John 1, Colossians 1). With this in mind, the most important reason to share our stories with one another is to see how and where GOD is at work in our lives, to see how we are ultimately a part of HIS story. The more clearly we can see this, the more we are able to see that we are not in fact at the center of our stories and to see Him who is truly at the center of ALL STORIES. In short, when we share our stories with one another, we are able to point one another to God by helping one another see who He is and what He's doing in one another's lives. Beautiful.

This has major impact, and we see evidence of this Scripturally. In Mark 5, after Jesus heals the man with many demons, Jesus instructs him to return to his home, to his friends, and to tell them his story with the purpose of

sharing “. . . how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” This man’s story was ultimately God’s story, the story of God’s work, the story of God’s mercy, and telling it in this way is where the impact comes in. Likewise, in John 4, we see Jesus speaking with the woman at the well and discussing her story. As she returned to her village and shared what Jesus had done for her and said to her, the outcome was astonishing: “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony . . .”, and these people then longed for time at the feet of Jesus, claiming that “. . . this is indeed the Savior of the world.” Let us pray that God would allow us opportunities

So, the onus and privilege is ours to lead the charge by sharing our stories, and to do so in such a way that we tell others HOW MUCH THE LORD HAS DONE FOR US, AND HOW HE HAS HAD MERCY ON US. In doing this, sharing our stories with one another becomes a practical way for us to see the hand of God at work in one another’s lives and to give Him honor and glory, and hearing the stories of those in our stead becomes a practical way to demonstrate grace, show compassion, develop understanding, and point one another to the One who is at the center of every story.

Application and Prayer

Sharing Our Stories

Some folks have asked, “What does it mean to share my story?” That’s a great question, and there are several ways to get at this. As we move through life, we continually add more micro-stories to our meta-story, and sharing these micro-stories as we are in relationship to one another is a beautiful way for us to see God at work. Many folks in our context at Vintage21 Church have found value in sharing their meta-story as well, meaning sharing the story of their lives, birth to present, sharing memorable, shaping experiences as well as mundane facts that they simply remember, and for those who are in Christ, sharing the details of their need for Christ, how they became aware of this need, how much the Lord has done for them, and how He has shown them mercy, as we see in Scripture. Sometimes this takes 10 minutes, sometimes 20 minutes, sometimes much longer. Several ideas were shared by Leaders and Coaches for how storytelling has been successfully incorporated into our groups, and here are some of them:

- Each week someone in the group shares his/her meta-story, moving through the group until all have shared – this often creates a depth of community that was previously unavailable
- Breaking out by gender to share stories or to share those stories that may be inappropriate to share across gender
- Incorporating prayer into the storytelling, allowing the group to pray for the storyteller as specific aspects of their story are revealed, asking for healing, praising God for His work and mercy, etc.
- Sharing stories one-on-one for those who might be intimidated to share in a larger group – this ensures that no one is left out – in some cases, the storyteller feels more comfortable sharing his/her story with multiple people, just one at a time

I would encourage you as Leaders and Coaches to take the lead in this and either begin or continue sharing your stories with one another in your groups. We’ve found here at Vintage21 Church that this has profound impact provided that our focus remains on the Lord, seeking to love one another by increasing understanding, showing compassion, demonstrating grace, bearing one another’s burdens, and pointing one another to the work of the Lord and mercy that He shows us. And we must pray.

- Pray, asking for clear opportunities to share your story, telling how much the Lord Jesus has done for you, and telling how merciful the Lord has been to you
- Pray that the Lord would be clearly shown as the center, the hero, of all of our stories
- Pray that the Father would draw people to Himself through the sharing of our stories – the sharing of HIS

story.

Sources

- Prayer
- Jeff Vanderstelt and Soma Communities
- Community Group Leaders and Coaches at Vintage21 Church