



TELL YOUR STORY

A Training Resource on Crafting Your Story of Faith and
Clearly Presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

TELL THE STORY



A FAITHPATH Resource



**TELL YOUR
STORY**
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STORY**



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CONTENTS

i	<i>Introduction</i>	5
ii	FAITH <i>PATH</i>	6
1	<i>Your Story</i>	11
2	<i>Organizing Your Story</i>	21
3	<i>Telling Your Story</i>	33
4	<i>The Essential Gospel</i>	43
5	<i>Telling The Story</i>	55
6	<i>Gospel Conversations</i>	67

INTRO

Discipleship is the lifelong pursuit of nearness and submission to Jesus, our Master, by developing in yourself Jesus' character, values and mission. Trusting in Jesus for salvation is the absolute necessary beginning. All Christian discipleship starts here, but it doesn't end here.

This study is a part of your discipleship. It will help you tell your story of personal faith in Jesus Christ. It will also help you tell *the* story, the Gospel message, and equip you to engage people in Gospel-centered conversations. Together, these practices are an essential part of your discipleship. No follower of Jesus is fully equipped or maximally fruitful without learning and living out these two simple practices.

The following chapters will train you to become more comfortable telling your personal story of faith and sharing the greatest story ever told—the good news of Jesus Christ. Fear and intimidation on this subject sabotage many people, but we will work to dismantle these obstacles with truth, prayer and practice.

This study was written within the incredible pastoral team culture of Faith Bible Church. It is also deeply indebted to the excellent work of EvanTell, a gospel-centered training ministry in Dallas, Texas, and is done with their knowledge. You can access their excellent training tools and resources at: evantell.org.



Scot Pollok | Lead Pastor

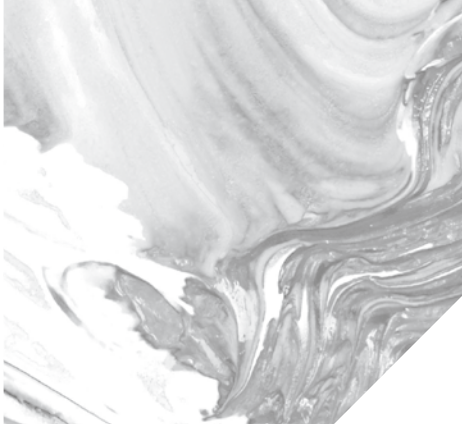
FAITHPATH

Have you ever thought about what it means to follow someone? To follow, first of all, means that someone is going before you. That's pretty simple. Secondly, to follow someone means that you have to give up on your own way. It's impossible to follow someone and choose your own path. Lastly, following means that your only task is to stay close to the person who is leading. At the very heart of following is nearness and attention.

Simple truth is sometimes the most difficult to understand and accept. The truth about following may be a good example. This difficulty becomes evident when we talk specifically about following Jesus. Most people view "following Jesus" at least one of two ways.

There are many who would define following Jesus by including a set of strict, legalistic rules and lifestyle disciplines. Others may choose to define following Jesus by simple identification. If they believe in Jesus, have placed their faith in Him for salvation, or identify as a Christian, then they are "following Jesus." But both of these ideas miss the mark in important ways.

Discipleship is much more than identification. It is about transformation towards a specific target: the likeness of Jesus. Discipleship is also much more nurturing than a strict set of rules will ever allow. It's true that disciples will forego dangerous and sinful activities as they follow after Jesus, but it is also true, if not truer, that they will start new activities and adventures in faith. They will trek over new ground, expand their understanding, explore their freedom in Christ and follow the Spirit of God into new territories of faith, holiness and fruitfulness.



This study is designed to cover a very specific aspect of your discipleship. It will help you confidently and clearly share two stories as one. First, you will learn how to share *your* story of faith in Jesus. Second, you will learn how to combine your story of faith into a clear presentation of *the* story of the Gospel, the offer of eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ.

This study must, above all, be crystal clear at one specific point. In order to “tell the story” of Jesus—both your story of faith and the story of the Gospel itself—you must begin with your personal faith. To share faith and the Gospel, you must be a believer. You must trust in Jesus. Skipping this essential first step would lead you to tell a story of something less than personal faith. It would lead you to explain a saving Gospel message that you haven’t believed yourself. Because this is so important, we will pause for a brief moment to ask the most important question: Have you trusted in Jesus for eternal life?

As we will see, the message of the Gospel is both bad news and good news. The bad news is about sin and darkness. Since Adam and Eve, all people have been born into sin. All people have committed sin, and the result of sin is death. This is the bad news; sin makes people dead. But the good news is that Jesus can bring you back to life. By His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, He perfectly accomplished all that was necessary to save you. By trusting in Jesus, you cross over from death to life. This is more than just understanding truth. Faith in Jesus is an act of trust. Only by placing your faith in Jesus are you saved. This salvation is a free gift of God’s grace. There is no other way.

FAITHPATH

— DISCIPLESHIP MAP —



Have you trusted Jesus for salvation? If you have, then the rest of this study will be a powerful tool in your hands. If you have not yet trusted in Jesus, then we suggest you pause to truly consider Jesus, the perfection of His sacrifice, your sin and the limits of goodness and good works, both of which fall hopelessly short of being able to save you. Trust in Jesus right now! What is preventing you? We have another print and electronic resource entitled [GRACE](#) that may help you better understand the Gospel and God's free gift of life in Jesus Christ.

Now, back to this study. Following Jesus is not willy-nilly. It's not like a post-modern art appreciation student studying abstract painters: *whatever you want to see is what you should see*. Nope. It's nothing like that. No disciple of Jesus experiences the fullness of God's desires by charting her own course. As we have suggested, that simply is not truly following someone. Following Jesus is made clear in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament.



But following Jesus is not a six-year graduate degree either. It is not primarily about classroom work, memorization, exams, homework, syllabi and time served. Following Jesus as a disciple is first and foremost about a close friendship. It is fundamentally concerned with the ongoing development of intimacy with Jesus. This is discipleship. As such, there are very clear milestones, stops, topics of conversations, actions, values and developments, but these rise above a strict classroom or courtroom vibe. Christian discipleship also never ends, just as the development of a friendship never ends.

In order to assist followers of Jesus in their discipleship, we have created the map called **FAITHPATH**, seen above. This remarkably simple map captures the whole of New Testament teaching on discipleship in a single glance. To be sure, this map is only a picture. Just like a printed map of Houston, Texas cannot fully tell the story of every life that lives within the city itself, the **FAITHPATH** map is simply an illustration. Please use it like you use a map: to gain bearings, to clarify where you've already been and decide where you'd like to go next.

To engage **FAITHPATH** fully, there are three simple rules. First, there is only one starting point: faith in Jesus. As we have said above, every disciple of Jesus must begin with personal faith in Jesus. There is no substitute or secondary path. Everything begins here.

Secondly, after this first step, there is no strict sequence of steps. While some steps, like the focus on this study, should naturally come earlier in a disciple's life than others, there is no absolute need to walk through first-year studies in order to engage third-year studies. Even though spiritual maturity is built slowly, all that God has for His children is open to them at all times.

Thirdly, for the rest of the steps on the map, with the exception of the starting point, there is no completion or graduation. Each of the markers and stops in your discipleship will take a lifetime to engage. For example, baptism is a one-time event that every believer in Jesus is invited. It is all about identifying with Jesus' death and resurrection within a community of believers. But while it is a one-time event, an ongoing understanding of baptism is important to your influence of others, especially how you help others through their **FAITHPATH**. Spending time with Jesus, understanding generosity or taking grace to your world are all lifelong pursuits.

Now that we've set the scene, clarified the goal and introduced our specific topic, let's get to it. To tell *your* story of faith in Jesus and to clearly share *the* story of the Gospel will begin with some simple questions, continue with some organization and finish with some prayer and practice.

The study before you is broken down into six weeks or installments. This breakdown is intentionally engineered for small group discussion or family study. At the very least, you will want to go through this study with a close Christian friend or mentor in order to get the most from it. ▲

The background is a vibrant, monochromatic yellow-orange color. It features intricate, swirling patterns that resemble marbled paper or liquid paint being stirred. The patterns are fluid and organic, with some areas showing more defined, concentric swirls while others are more chaotic and textured. The overall effect is one of movement and depth.

CHAPTER 1

Your Story

CHAPTER 1

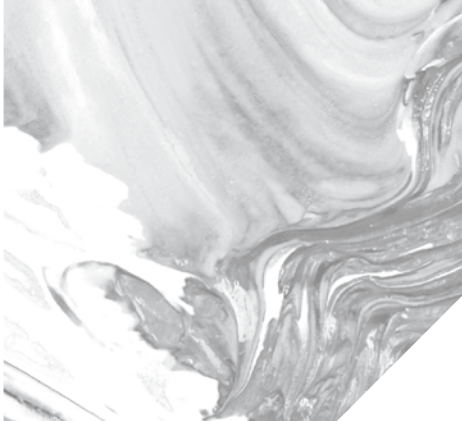
Your Story

I love a good story. I love reading great stories, both nonfiction and fiction. I love watching great movies that tell great stories. I think everyone alive is engineered by God to love stories. It is how we communicate. I believe it is part of God's image in us.

Recently I discovered the true account of a young boy from India named Saroo. Growing up in the peculiar mixture of poverty and contentedness that is only possible with extreme youth and naivety, Saroo was separated from his family by a series of tragic circumstances. At only four years of age, he ended up alone, homeless, terrified and in danger of exploitation on the streets of a sprawling and unfamiliar city. Fortunately he was rescued by a ministry to orphaned or abandoned children and adopted into a kind and generous Australian family who struggled with infertility.

Twenty years later, as an independent adult, Saroo was introduced to brand new technology called Google Earth. Linking the vague memories of his birthplace and the day of his separation with the satellite images of India, Saroo spent thousands of hours over several years searching for the place of his birth. Finally he found something that looked familiar. After years of searching and decades of questions, Saroo had located his home. Traveling there in person, he was dramatically reunited with his birth-mother and sister who had long thought him dead. Saroo's story is powerfully retold in the 2016 Oscar nominated film *Lion*.

What a story. I can hardly recap it in writing without tears welling up. But there is an even more important truth underneath a story like Saroo's: *your* story is just as dramatic, emotional and compelling as his. Yes, *your* story. You may think your life has been unremarkable, normal, or even boring; but



there is nothing ordinary about God's work of creation and redemption. This means your story is worth telling too.

Your Story is a Gift

As a believer in Jesus, you are a powerful apologetic. Did you know that? An apologetic is an argument for something, especially belief in God. If you have trusted in Jesus for salvation from your sin, your story of faith is a potent and influential tool in sharing Jesus with others. This is one of God's many gifts. When you believed in Jesus, God poured out His great grace to save you as a free gift. And God's grace always has a way of spreading. God's grace in salvation transforms your story, even the darkest of details, into a gift that you can give away to others, an apologetic. Your story can become a gift that dramatically changes lives. You simply have to give it away.

You know better than anyone that your life story is not just about you. There are a few very influential people in your life and probably scores more major players beyond that. In the same way, your story of faith in Jesus is not just about you. In truth, it is much more about God and His grace than about you. While it is your story, the true hero and center of your story of faith and salvation is God. Remember, although all that was required on your part was faith in Jesus, your salvation was not cheap. It cost God everything. It cost the life of His Son. Your salvation is a miracle of grace. Your story of salvation, no matter how or when it came, is primarily about Jesus, who willingly gave everything for you. Thus, your story of faith is really about Jesus. As a response, when you share your story in this way, you show gratitude and glorify the God who saved you.

Collaborating with God

When anyone teaches or preaches about evangelism, I believe most people in the room feel either guilt or fear, and most likely a combination of the two. Some of us feel guilt because we don't often share our faith. We don't often share our faith because we don't really know how. This leads us to fear. It can be very intimidating to talk about God in an authoritative way. It can be scary to be asked questions about God, Jesus, faith, the cross or whatever is keeping someone from faith. Fear and guilt are big barriers for many and we must not pretend otherwise. But both fear and guilt have a way of obscuring some very critical truths.

First of all, God is working constantly to reveal Himself to people. He is not sitting silently in some far-away heaven, frustrated you aren't doing more for His glory. He is working (see *John 5:16-17*). He is pursuing people, the very people you are praying for. This means that when you engage with others, you are actually joining God in His work; collaborating with God as you tell your story of faith. Think about that for a moment.

Secondly, your Heavenly Father promises to provide all you need to do the important work of sharing and collaborating (see *2 Peter 1:3*). Think about that as well. God created you, saved you by faith, and is now equipping you with a powerful story to share, a story which He inhabits and infuses with power. As a believer, you have the Holy Spirit of God living inside of you. You have God's inspired Word. You have the support of the Body of Christ, God's church. You have the abundance of His free grace to surround you as you speak, share and invite. He has given you all the tools you need.

Consider this. While the true story of Saroo's reunion with his birth-mother is dramatic and emotional, your faith-story of reunion with your heavenly Father is even more so. You may not have spent thousands of hours trying to find God like Saroo did his birthplace, but you may have spent many years wandering for more, for truth, for meaning. You may have gone through a very dark place in order to understand your need for Jesus.



You may have been gifted with a strong and vibrant legacy of faith which you simply needed to make your own. However your story of faith unfolded, please know that it is powerful. It is strong. It is valuable in the lives of others. It is meant to be shared. God wants you to share it.

John's Story

One of the disciples that seemed to be closest to Jesus was John. After penning his biography or "life story" of Jesus in the fourth Gospel, John also wrote several smaller letters. The first of these opens with a small testimonial from the Apostle himself:

"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

—1 John 1:1-3

This is one of the many versions of John's personal story of faith in Jesus. His story is very different than yours or mine because John actually walked and talked with Jesus during His earthly ministry. He ate with Him. He gave Him a hug. He sat around the fire talking and asking questions. He lived and moved with Him for years. That is why John said that Jesus *"was manifested to us,"* and *"we have seen and heard,"* *"we have seen with our eyes...looked at and touched with our hands."* This is a testimony. This is John's story of Jesus.

“ I met Jesus when I was 8 years old, attending a vacation Bible school. My teacher talked about sin, my sin and the curse of sin on all. She did not need to convince me that I was a sinner; I knew that very well. She told me of the grace of God in sending His Son Jesus Christ to save me from my sin. She asked me to trust Jesus Christ to be my Savior, and to ask Him into my heart and life. I decided that would be a very good thing to do, so, with her help, I did it. I am so thankful for servants like this teacher, who led me to a saving knowledge of The Lord Jesus Christ.”

—Randy

Your story is no less powerful than John's. Jesus saved you personally. His love for you is individual, special, intimate and unique. The Apostle John was also saved by his faith in Jesus, just like you were saved by faith. This makes your story powerful. You are a living story. You are a powerful apologetic.

Peter's Story

Peter, another of Jesus' closest friends penned a powerful verse that can serve as a theme verse for our study. ***"Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."***
-1 Peter 3:15

Peter's words draw a few very important distinctions. First, your story is essentially an "account of the hope that is in you." If you are a believer in Jesus, then God forgave all of your sins and wrote your name in His Book of Life. You can be confident of your salvation because of God's promise, which should give you incredible hope and assurance of your eternal life. Sharing your story or "giving a defense" is not the same as being an expert witness in theology or knowing all of the Bible. It is simply being able to say that you have hope in Jesus and explain why.

The Apostle Peter wisely directs you to do this sharing with gentleness and reverence. Telling your story of faith and the story of the Gospel is not brash, forceful, rude or arrogant. The act of sharing does not turn the other person into a project. Telling your story is an act of love and is done with intentional gentleness and in worshipful reverence to God, the ultimate author of the story.

Consider Your Story

Since your story of faith in Jesus is a powerful apologetic, the first work is to consider the main elements and markers in your story. Remember,

your story is unique. There is no other story like it. While there are billions of stories of faith in Jesus, there is not a single one in all of history that is like your story. This means your story is remarkable, extraordinary and incomparable. God has no other story like it. He can use no other story the way He can use yours.

But it has also taken many years to live out your story. When you share it you will likely only have minutes, so you must do some work to craft your story into a relatable tool. To begin the work of crafting and sharpening your story, take some time to reflect on and answer the following questions as a way of engaging the bones and structure of your life history. Write down your thoughts in a journal or in the space provided.

- *What were the critical points and circumstances of your early years as a kid?*
- *Was Christ, the church or the gospel present or absent in your early years? How?*
- *What are some of the most beautiful and meaningful parts of your life history? What events pop into your mind first, both positive and negative?*
- *What are the hardest and darkest parts of your life history?*
- *What are the most challenging or transformative parts?*
- *What are the most influential relationships (positive and negative) in your story?*
- *Looking as far back as you can, where do you see God's activity and God's grace at work in your story?*
- *As you trusted Jesus for salvation, how did you come to understand your sin, need for a savior, and the work of Jesus on the cross?*

As you continue in this study, you will build more and more confidence in your own story and eventually the Gospel story. We will take it one step at a time. If you are faithful to do the training practices and consider the reflection and discussion questions at the end of each chapter, your progress will be even greater. Your confidence will grow even stronger. ▲



Training Practice: Bullet Points and Prayer

This week you will spend some time reflecting and praying over your life and how God may want to use your story in the lives of very specific people.

First, as a way of building on the previous thought questions, open a new document on your computer or use the space provided here, and list out in bulleted form the major events, markers and relationships of your life. Don't worry about specifying all the details for now; just write a list, using as few words as possible for each bullet. Include both difficult things and beautiful things. Try to keep this to one page and as simple as possible.

Next, look at your list and pray over your story. Think about all that God has done in your life, all that He has forgiven, redeemed and healed. Take a moment and thank God. Worship Him. You will come back to this list and work with it much more in the next few weeks.

Finally, even if you already have one, begin a new list of the non-believers in your life, those who have not yet placed their trust in Jesus Christ. These are people with whom you have a close friendship or regular interaction. If you can't come up with more than seven, list three places where you might build a relationship with non-believers. Begin to pray that God would graciously connect your story with these people.



Group Discussion:

1. Discuss your thoughts and challenges on this week's study with your small group.
2. Fill your small group in on your progress in this week's training practice.
3. When have you been profoundly influenced by someone else's story of faith? Who was it? What effect did it have?
4. Describe a time you've been able to share a big chunk of your life story, especially your story of faith in Jesus. How did that go? How did it make you feel?
5. What fears or anxieties do you have about sharing your story of faith in Jesus?
6. What was most challenging about reflecting on your life story? Was there an event that was particularly painful or powerful?
7. This week you were asked to "pray over your story." How will you practically do this?



CHAPTER 2

Organizing Your Story

CHAPTER 2

Organizing Your Story

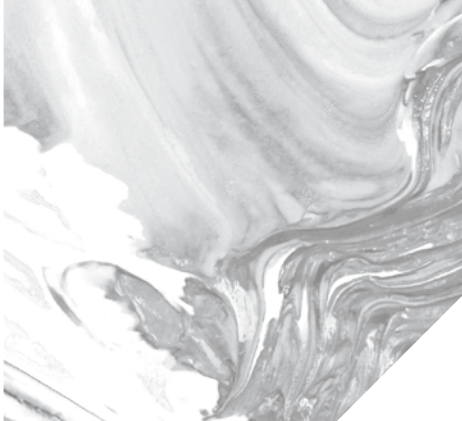
When I was about eight years old, my home-room teacher at a very small school in a very tiny Polish community in South Texas announced to the class that we would begin an art project. While most sighed with resignation, I was thrilled.

We were each given a square piece of wood and a bottle of Elmer's glue. We were to gather knick-knacks from home—bottle caps and string, pieces of paper and plastic doo-dads—to create an art piece of our own design. There were very little instructions so we had total artistic freedom, along with a decent chunk of time to work on it every day.

I obsessed over my masterpiece. I actually hid it in a stairwell during the entire construction phase because I wanted a “big reveal.” My particular design was all about symmetry (yes, at eight years old). Each of the scraps I selected had to be in a set of two, or preferably four. I divided the board on several axes and went to work creating a very ornate, intricate and abstract piece, each element with its mirror twin across the board. Imagine a miniature, urban city scape with incredible style.

I'm not kidding when I say I dreamt about that silly little board. I barely paid attention in the rest of my subjects because I was counting the seconds until we had time to continue our creative work. Although the whole project lasted only a few weeks in my memory, I still get a little giddy thinking about it today, almost forty years later.

I don't know about you, but I've always been fascinated with the creative process. Whether it be a sketch, building a house, mastering a culinary dish or designing a piece of furniture, the study and hard work involved in the creative process has always deeply connected with me. I believe it



is part of the image of God in all of us. God, Himself the ultimate Creator, produces this passion, even if you are not the "artist type."

My son and I love to watch a television competition where men and women forge knives and swords and then test them. A blacksmith or blade smith, even in our day of advanced technology, takes their creative vision through several intense and irreplaceable processes. A smithing forge can reach temperatures of 2500° Fahrenheit or more. That's pretty hot. And it needs to be. Hard metal has to be nearly melted to become malleable and workable, but get it too hot and it is ruined. Once it is heated, worked, and cooled in a controlled environment, the shaping and forming become permanent, solid and usable. Metal worked in this way becomes even harder than it was before. But it is a difficult, sweaty process.

The difference between a metal forge and my eight-year-old stairwell project is pretty wide. However, both processes are headed to a specific, intentional conclusion. They have a design in mind and they follow certain steps to achieve the end result. Even though one is a functional tool and the other is purely aesthetic, both serve the purpose of the designer.

The Forge of Your Story

In much the same way, you have already begun crafting and organizing your story of faith toward a specific purpose. Like a forge, things can get heated, as you recall, and work through some of the details of your past. For some, this can be painful. But for the person of faith in Jesus, these painful parts of the story are not the end. They are not the defining moments of your life. Applying the truth that Jesus brings, the grace of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit to your story directs your forging

process, forming and sharpening your story for great purposes. Once completely forged, your story can become an immensely valuable and beautiful tool in a trained hand.

Think about what is involved in making a movie. Consider specifically a non-fiction movie closely based on true events. Undoubtedly the lives of the main characters are much wider than a typical two-hour movie will allow. There is no adequate or efficient way of telling it all. So the screenwriters and producers work intentionally for months and months in telling the story in a compelling way, including all of the relevant details while excluding most of the whole. They have a very specific goal in mind, working hard to produce that goal. You are doing exactly the same work as you craft your story of faith.

How will you tell your story with purpose? How can you take a lifetime of events, relationships, tragedies, and triumphs and faithfully relate it to another person in just a few minutes? Is that even possible? Yes, it is possible. In fact, this will be your goal. We will begin by working to organize your story of faith into three foundational parts.

Three Parts of the Whole

Have you ever thought about a story? Not the details of a particular story but the background of how a good story is told or written. Recently a group of researchers from the University of Vermont and the University of Adelaide in Australia set out to map patterns in stories. By feeding nearly 2000 works of fiction into a supercomputer, they created an ingenious weighting system and attempted to map the trajectory and emotional weight of stories. They discovered six basic types of stories: 1) *rise*—or rags to riches, 2) *fall*—or riches to rags, 3) *fall then rise*, 4) *rise then fall*, 5) *fall then rise then fall*, and 6) *rise then fall then rise*. These simple results are powerfully revealing: all human stories have a theme—the interplay of rise and fall. While we may interpret that in many different ways, it seems to be the central and unifying movement of all stories.



The Bible is a story of creation, fall and redemption. It also has movement, tension and resolution. Your story is also a story of movement. But as a believer and follower of Jesus, the heart of your story is how you came to place your faith in Him, which can be seen as fall to rise, or better lost to found. But there is even more. In your continued struggle with sin this side of heaven, there are smaller cycles of falling and rising, confession and repentance, and healing and then struggle again. This, too, is part of *your* story.

In literature, a story with a happy beginning and ending (rise then fall then rise) is called a comedy. A story with a sad ending is called a tragedy. I'm not a fan of tragedies. The end of *Romeo and Juliet* is just plain wrong in my opinion. I am a comedy guy. Not the funny, ha-ha type comedy, but a story with a happy ending. Now that's more my speed. Comedies are satisfying. They satisfy my soul. All my favorite fiction works, such as Tolkein's *The Lord of the Rings*, have happy endings. Yes, the ending is extremely complicated, often with layers of unexpected twists, but eventually good triumphs and the main characters are happy and well.

Did you know the Bible is a comedy, literarily speaking? It has a happy beginning—the perfection of creation, man and woman in the garden with God—and then a plot developing tension—the rebellion and curse of sin. For most of the story, through millennia, we are searching and waiting for the promised hero to be revealed and solve the problem. Finally, it has a happy ending (rise then fall then rise). After Jesus, the hero, sacrifices Himself in a horrific display of love and pain, He is resurrected to new life. In doing so, He breaks the stronghold of sin and its curse forever, freeing all who believe in Him to the promise of eternal life in a Kingdom perfectly free from sin, the devil and the curse.

“ I was in Colorado at summer camp in 6th grade. The speaker at our evening session told his story, and in it he shared the Gospel. I only knew "faith in God" as right and wrong - "Do right, and don't do wrong." But he spoke about how we could never be good enough, and that really caught my attention. Once I realized what Jesus had done for us and for my sin, it was the best thing ever. I put my faith in Him that night.”

—Logan

At some point in the near future Jesus will return, set up his Kingdom, forever imprison the devil and free us from the curse and presence of sin. This is the happy ending; yet to happen, but already written.

This story of God has a beginning, a middle and an end. Let me suggest that whatever the movement, just like the Gospel story itself, all good stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. The same is true of your story of faith. Even though it is still being “written” and worked out, it has a “happy ending” in regards to your salvation in Jesus. Even if all the wounds and scars you’ve picked up along the way are still aching, one day soon Jesus will return and His glory and goodness will finally overpower and undo all of those “un-ended” parts of your story.

Because of Jesus, even from within the journey you can tell a full story. Sometimes the best stories are told from within. As we continue, think about your faith story in these three parts:

- 1. Where were you before you trusted in Jesus?**
- 2. How did you come to understand the Gospel and believe in Jesus?**
- 3. What difference has Jesus made in your life since?**

These three questions will form the backbone of how you will share your story of faith in Jesus. They are your beginning, middle and end. And like the Bible itself, they are a comedy in form, ending with the joyful fruit of eternal life in Jesus Christ. This happy-ending-story is not fake or false in any way because it will honestly include and accept the reality of ongoing struggles and sin. Just like all followers of Jesus, you have yet to be totally perfected and freed from the presence of sin. If you are honest about this in your story, you will find that this makes your story even more relatable and powerful.

1. Where were you before Jesus? Consider these points:

- You may have grown up in a Christian home with believing parents, but spiritual identity is not transferred by birthright or genetics... where did you fit in?
- You may have grown up in a non-Christian home, perhaps even a family that was antagonistic towards faith, religion or Jesus... when did you first realize your spiritual surroundings?
- When did you first come to recognize the depths of your sin? What kind of consequences did your sin cause?
- You may have had painful experiences with isolation, fear, abuse, influential relationships or losses. What were the big influences?
- You may have trusted in Christ at an extremely early age, barely able to remember what it was like beforehand. This is a great story, a great beginning. Did you ever experience times of rebellion, doubt or wanderings?

2. How did you come to understand the Gospel?

- When did you first come to grips with the problem of sin in your life?
- How did the reality of sin and sin's consequences affect you?
- When did you first understand and see Jesus as your Savior?
- Who first shared the gospel message with you?
- What was the content of the gospel message shared with you?
- How easy or difficult was it for you to trust in Jesus?

3. What difference has Jesus made now?

- What is the most noticeable or impactful difference Jesus has made in your life?
- Think about your heart, your emotions, your sense of worth, your outlook on life, your relationships, your sense of belonging.
- What are some of the major epiphanies or revelations from the Lord that you've experienced?
- How do you continue to struggle with obedience and sin?
- What does your daily walk with Christ look like right now?
- For what are you most grateful?

Fleshing out these questions is the next step in telling your story. This is not just “trying hard” to tell a compelling story of faith in Jesus. This process takes some work, thought, preparation and planning. This is training.

Remember, your story of faith in Jesus is worth telling because Jesus is always worth talking about. And if it is worth telling, it is worth telling well and with purpose. ▲



Training Practice: *shaping your story into three parts*

In chapter one, you practiced writing your story on one page in a very simple, bulleted list of major events and relationships. This week, begin with a new document or in the space provided here and write down, with ample space in between, the three major parts of your story as said in this chapter. Then, prayerfully consider how each of the items from your bulleted list in chapter one fit into one of these three categories. This will take some time, thought and prayer.

Next, go through your newly organized story and identify the absolutely critical elements and those that could be skipped if necessary. This will help you identify the indispensable "heart" of your story, which is crucial in the telling of it in the next chapter.



Group Discussion:

1. Discuss your thoughts and challenges on this week's study with your small group.
2. Fill your small group in on your progress in this week's training practice.
3. Can you remember what it was like before you trusted in Jesus? If so, what about that time in your life can help you relate to others who have yet to trust in Him?
4. Did you wrestle at all with eternity or mortality or the existence or nature of God before you came to faith in Jesus? How will this help you relate to others?
5. Some people come to understand the Gospel over a period of time, but you might be able to remember one moment or one event that was critical in your salvation. If so, what were the most memorable or powerful words, actions, invitations or relationships involved?
6. How often do you think about the time you first believed in Jesus, or your first few years as a new believer? What would be the benefit of reflecting on that time more often?
7. Did organizing your story help you feel more or less confident in sharing it? Why?



CHAPTER 3

*Telling
Your Story*

CHAPTER 3

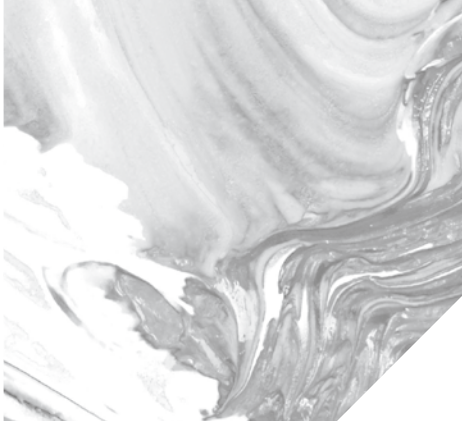
Telling Your Story

Have you ever been at a party with that guy? You know, that guy who's always surrounded by a small crowd of people like a gentle rugby scrum, folks hanging on his every word and gesture? You know that guy, right? He's the guy that either loves being the center of attention, is an incredible story teller, or both. If he's a storyteller, then I too would be part of the scrum. I love good stories. Have I told you that?

I'm sure you have a favorite story to tell, even if you don't think you are very good at telling it. Perhaps it's an adventure you had growing up, or meeting your first love, the day you were married, when your first child or grandchild was born, or a story from college. You have at least a few stories that are very special to you. And if the environment is comfortable and you trust the people you're with, you love telling these stories.

What if your story of faith in Jesus became one of those stories? You would look forward to talking about Jesus, how He has saved you and how He is still working in your life. It would be natural. You could work it into several forms, from a 20-second version to a full story. But, as we have suggested, telling a story well is an art form. It takes practice, attention and courage. Relating your story of faith in Jesus as a way to tell the greater story of the Gospel is the single most powerful story a person can tell.

Fortunately, the Scriptures tell you clearly how to share your story of faith in Jesus. There are even several beautiful examples. This is how the Apostle Paul told his story of faith before an angry mob of Jews in the Jerusalem Temple. To say he spoke to a rough crowd would be an understatement. They wanted to physically tear him limb from limb. Obviously, he didn't have long and he was ultimately cut short, but what is recorded is a potent example of what you have been working on in this study. Read it with attention.



"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished. "But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.' But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.

"A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him. And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

“It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.’ And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices...” –Acts 22:3-22

Paul would have continued with more but he was interrupted because he mentioned taking the Gospel message to Gentiles. Let's just say the Jews didn't like hearing that.

Analysis of Paul's Story

Pay attention to a few things in this text. Where does Paul begin? How does he talk about Jesus and his encounter with Jesus? How does Paul relate a life change afterward? About how long did this “speech” take to say aloud? Can you see the three parts from chapter two? Read it again.

Can you see these same three foundations in Paul's second testimony in Acts 26? This time it was given before King Herod Agrippa.

“So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; the promise

to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?

“So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

“While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’

“So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also

at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

–Acts 26:4-23

Again, at this point Paul was interrupted by Agrippa. But Paul made the point of his testimony clear and directly asked, “***King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.***” Agrippa replied to Paul, “***In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.***” And Paul said, “***I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.***” –Acts 26:27-29

What do you see in Paul’s story? Do you see the three foundational parts (before Jesus–belief in Jesus–differences Jesus has made) yet again? How long do you think it took Paul to speak this out loud? Probably just a few minutes.

Overcoming Fear

This week you will practice sharing your story with a friend as spelled out in the training practice. Even though it may not be perfectly polished, you have done the work to begin sharing it with a close Christian friend. Take some time to pray, review your story, then share it. You can even write some simple notes. As you read that last sentence you will likely come face to face with fear and the lies that fear tells. Lies that may sound a lot like this:

- *You aren't a good speaker. You can't do this.*
- *You're an introvert. This kind of stuff is for other people.*
- *This isn't your gift. You really have no role to play.*
- *Your story isn't good. It's not big enough, clean enough, interesting enough.*
- *You're still struggling with sin. You can't share your story of faith as a sinner.*
- *People won't listen to you. They don't want to hear your story.*
- *You don't know theology. You can't answer big questions if they ask.*
- *You aren't prepared for this.*

All of these statements may not resonate with you, but I bet at least a few do. Please understand, each statement above is a lie. You don't have to be a good speaker; Moses wasn't. You don't have to be an extrovert; God equips each of His children (that means you, believer). You don't have to have a special spiritual gift and your story is amazing because it's a story of salvation and resurrection; remember you were dead in your sins.

Yes, you still struggle with sin, but you don't have to be perfect to talk to others about God. And believe me, everyone is yearning for hope and grace. Most people are just searching for it very badly. People want to hear a message of life, they will listen. You don't have to be a Bible expert to share your faith and as you continue in this study, you will be equipped.



I learned about God from my parents growing up in Wisconsin. But I never heard the Gospel of Christ and the message of His grace from anyone personally. I didn't get it until I was sitting in a jail cell at the age of 21. It was then that I was confronted with my sins head-on. I found a book on how to be born again through faith in Christ on the book cart that came to my jail cell. I received Christ as my Savior that first night."

—Mark

There you have it. Don't give in to fear. This step in your spiritual growth and discipleship can be one of the most powerful and life-changing things you do. As you step out in faith, following and trusting, you will see God keep His promises. Remember, Peter's view of Jesus was much more transformative when he stepped out of the boat. ▲



Training Practice: *A Trial Run*

This week you are ready to begin sharing your story.

Begin with a good Christian friend, your spouse, even one of your children (that would be so cool), or a person in your small group. It may help to write it out, practice reading it through and timing it. Try to keep your story to seven minutes or less. That's a long time, believe me. The first time you share it, you can read it if you like. But it would be best to speak freely while following your outline.

Next, share your story with two more Christian friends as a way of practicing. Let them know you are working on your story. Perhaps invite them into this study with you if they aren't already. Ask them to listen as friends and give you helpful feedback. Listen to their comments, take some notes and pray through them to discern if you might change or adjust your story.



Group Discussion:

1. Discuss your thoughts and challenges on this week's study with your small group.
2. Fill your small group in on your progress in this week's training practice.
3. **Read Acts 3:1-10.** What was the reaction of the lame man after Peter spoke to him? How can you emulate this man's emotion and response in the telling of your story? What was the reaction of the people looking on?
4. **Read Luke 8:26-39.** How was this troubled man different after Jesus healed him? What did the man want of Jesus afterward? What was Jesus' direction? What did the man do in response? How does this story reinforce your training and practice over the last three weeks?
5. What are your specific fears in sharing your story with others?
6. What is God's role and work as you share your story?
7. How do you think God could use your story in the lives of unbelievers?



CHAPTER 4

*The Essential
Gospel*

CHAPTER 4

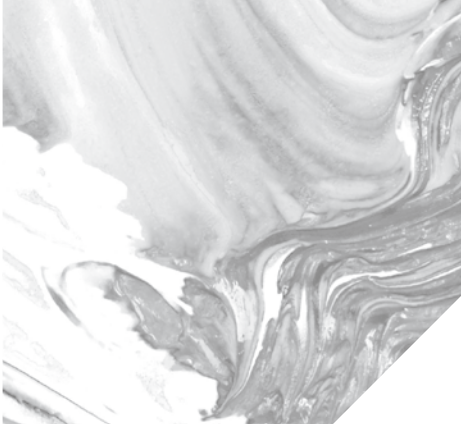
The Essential Gospel

It was a Wednesday, just two days into November. I was a freshman in college and had recently been exploring what I considered an attractive new experience of faith and Christianity, significantly different than what I had grown up knowing. I had been attending a weekly Bible study by myself for several weeks and on this particular Wednesday, was scheduled to meet with the leader of the Bible study. I had never had a conversation with him before.

We met in the center of campus, outside the Student Center, at 1:15 p.m. It was my idea to meet, but I didn't even know what I wanted to talk about. I didn't have any specific questions; I just knew I wanted to talk with him. We both showed up on time and made small talk, sitting on a bench next to a water fountain. After a few minutes, the leader asked me about my relationship with God.

I had never been asked that question before and, to be honest, I found it rather strange. To me it was like asking what my favorite crater was on the dark side of the moon. I believed in God but couldn't tell this guy anything about a relationship with Him. The whole concept seemed distant if not impossible. He is God, after all. I was a skinny, young, barely above average college student. A relationship with the God of Creation sounded a bit too lofty—a thing to which I could aspire.

I remember not having much of an answer, which in itself was an answer for the leader. He seized the opportunity and opened his Bible, taking me to a couple different passages and clearly explaining why Jesus came, why He died on the cross, why He rose from the dead and the salvation He offered me as a free gift. I remember understanding it without difficulty, like a lamp was turned on in the dark room, the very room which I had lived in my entire life. Even though I had some questions (I still have lots



of questions, although the questions have changed), I remember jumping at the offer of life and forgiveness in Jesus. I placed my trust in Jesus at that very moment, to the best of my understanding, and prayed to God a prayer of thanksgiving at His amazing gift.

Before we parted ways, the leader shared with me a few more verses of Scripture that helped explain what had already happened in my heart because of my faith. He shared with me that I was secure in my salvation and that I could know that I was saved for sure. He then turned to matters of discipleship and sanctification, connected me with a local church where I could find a family of other believers, and directed me on how to engage God directly through the Scriptures, in worship, and prayer.

I clearly remember floating away from that conversation. My heart felt light. My eyes felt open for the very first time. I felt embraced by God Himself. It was the first breath of a brand new life. I struggle to find the words to describe it even now.

Becoming a Confident Witness

This week, in our study, I want to help you gain the confidence and knowledge to do for others what that Bible study leader did for me: share the Gospel clearly, concisely and confidently. If there is ever anything to get right, it is the offer of eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ. However, ask a dozen Christians from different circles and you will likely get very different descriptions of the gospel message.

So what is the Gospel? What is the right answer in its simplest form? In order to agree on the clear Gospel message, let us now turn to the authoritative

Scriptures themselves. Lest we drift off into well-intentioned efforts to make the Gospel message carry the full weight of all of our personal convictions, we must carefully engage the Scriptures, taking precise account of what they say and don't say.

The Bible on the Gospel

As we will see, there is very specific content to the gospel message. The New Testament consistently reveals these truths. As we study and clarify this absolutely essential content, the fourth book of the New Testament, the Gospel of John, will be our first stop. As it was explicitly written to share the Gospel of Jesus with unbelievers, John should be a regular source when you share the Gospel with others (see *John 20:30-31*). Here are five key passages; there are many others:

- **John 3:1-18:** *The story of Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus, including John 3:16*
- **John 5:24:** *A powerful and clear invitation to salvation by faith*
- **John 6:35-40:** *Jesus' own words about why He came and what He offers*
- **John 10:7-15; 25-30:** *Jesus' own words that He is the only way; His offer of security*
- **John 11:25-27:** *Jesus' own words about life to all who believe in Him*



There are many other texts we could include in this list. For the clarity and simplicity of our study, I would like to identify six other key New Testament texts that clearly present the good news of eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ:

- **Acts 16:30-31:** *A simple question and answer about salvation*
- **Romans 3:20-25:** *Good works cannot save, only faith in Jesus*
- **1 Corinthians 15:1-4:** *Paul's clear, concise gospel message*
- **Galatians 2:16:** *Faith, not good works, is what justifies (God declares you righteous)*
- **Ephesians 2:1-10:** *You were dead in sin, but made alive by God as a gift of grace*
- **Titus 3:4-7:** *A beautiful statement of salvation by faith in Jesus*

“ Growing up I attended church with my family every week, and agreed with everything I heard about God. But during my freshman year of college I had applied to be in a Christian organization, and during the interview process it became apparent that I was unable to answer very basic questions about my salvation. Brennan, one of the interviewers, and I met the following day at the chapel building on campus, where he presented the gospel to me and I accepted Christ on that day.”

—Josh

Clarity on Two Bible Themes

A careful reading of these 11 passages and many others like them will reveal only one requirement or condition for salvation: *faith in Jesus Christ*. A person is justified by faith in Jesus. Justification means to declare a person righteous, or in right or good standing with God. It is a judicial decision by God. *Justification* by faith in Jesus is a crystal clear truth of the Scriptures.

Sanctification is a big Bible word that describes a progressive change in lifestyle, actions, decisions and thinking over time.

A major source of confusion in Gospel presentations, which often leads to unclear, confused, complicated and contradictory thoughts, is the altogether different subject of *sanctification*. Sanctification is a big Bible word that describes a progressive change in lifestyle, actions, decisions and thinking over time. It is another word for the process of discipleship, which is a lifelong pursuit of holiness and maturity in the likeness of Jesus Christ. Involved in this massive New Testament subject is all manner of things like worship, prayer, Bible study, relational reconciliation, continual repentance from sin, good deeds, fruitfulness, sharing the Gospel with others and an ever-deepening understanding of the Scriptures, of God and of Christian living. These are sanctification and discipleship truths.

When these matters slide back into a gospel presentation, which is simply justification by faith, you end up with a bad Gospel message. It's bad because it is not biblical. It's not biblical because it confuses justification and sanctification, which are distinct and separate. Although you might not include such "big Bible words" in your testimony, it is critical that you understand them and their distinction.

As a personal example, I grew up in the church. I grew up a theist, a believer in God. But I also grew up confused about Jesus and salvation.

I constantly heard a gospel message that considered justification and sanctification to be the same thing. Thus, God only considered me to be righteous if I continued to show spiritual growth, increased holiness and decreased sinfulness. This was the big “if” and condition hanging over my head. To make matters worse, I couldn’t understand how Jesus’ death on the cross fit in with this big “if.” While the actions of spiritual growth and holiness are perfectly appropriate, making them a condition for salvation left me without any security, hope, joy, or peace. As we have seen, this confusion of ideas and conditions is untrue, unbiblical and dangerous.

How many times have you heard gospel messages like these?

- *Love Jesus, live a good life and you will go to Heaven when you die...maybe.*
- *Trust in Jesus, be baptized and confess all known sin and you will go to Heaven.*
- *Believe in Jesus and continue to walk in faith the rest of your life and you are saved.*
- *Love God, love people and become a member of a local church and you will be saved.*

Please do not misunderstand. Each specific element in the bad gospel messages above is good in itself. The teaching of the New Testament and Jesus Himself encourages or commands these actions. But what the Bible never does is attach them to the Gospel message of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. A person does not have to be good to be saved. They do not have to perform. Good people don’t go to heaven. Forgiven people go to heaven. The only requirement for salvation is faith in the Good One, Jesus, whose accomplishments on the cross and in the resurrection were perfect and complete, supplying all that was required to save us.

The Six Essential Elements of the Gospel

To share the Gospel accurately is to share it in the truth of the Scriptures. The Word of God carefully distinguishes between justification and sanctification, and our Gospel presentations should hold this same distinction. And while there are a few isolated New Testament texts that seem to confuse the simple Gospel with added elements or requirements, each of these texts have clear interpretations that conform to this consistent distinction. What is clear is this: there is only one consistent, thoroughly constant and faithful representation of the Gospel message throughout the New Testament: justification is by faith alone in Christ alone, a free gift of God's grace.

So, again, what is the simple Gospel message? What are the essential elements to a Gospel presentation? Based on the New Testament, there are six fundamental elements to the Gospel message:

1. **Jesus as the Son of God** (His identity as God; fully God and fully human)
2. **Jesus' death on the cross as a payment for sins** (He took our place as substitute, and perfectly satisfied the wrath of God)
3. **Jesus' resurrection from the dead** (His conquering of death)
4. **Your sinfulness and need of salvation** (All people are dead in their sins)
5. **Faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for salvation** (Your personal trust in Jesus)
6. **God's promise to save you as a free gift of His grace** (You are secure in God's promise; you did nothing to earn salvation and can do nothing to lose it)

These six fundamental elements perfectly conform to the 11 New Testament passages we listed previously. They faithfully represent all that Jesus and the rest of the writers of the New Testament reveal about the Gospel message. Most importantly, these six truths are the backbone of every good Gospel presentation, and they must not be added to.

The goal of this study is confidence and accuracy in presenting the gospel message. Because each conversation and friendship is different, you will likely alter your presentation based on the other person. As an example, to someone I don't know very well I might say:

"You might have noticed in your own heart or in the world that we are all broken. None of us: including you and me, are good enough to earn God's forgiveness for our sin. That is why God came to us. Jesus, God in the flesh, died on the cross as payment for the penalty of sin. He was buried and then rose three days later to new life. You can be rescued and saved from sin by placing your faith in Jesus as the only Savior. This is a free gift of God's grace. What is keeping you from trusting Him right now?"

However, for a close friend or family member you might go deeper, change the tone or speak to specific matters. This is why we are not memorizing a statement but rather building clarity and confidence in presenting the gospel naturally. Keep it simple. It must always be true. Let it come from your heart, borne out of love. ▲



Training Practice:

Carefully read through each of the biblical texts previously listed (*pages 46-47*). Consider what each text says about how a person is saved and how you might use each text to share the Gospel.

In a word document, the space provided here or in your journal, expand on each of the six essential gospel elements above in your own words. Then work to connect at least one of the biblical texts to each point.

Create your own outline of a Gospel presentation. Write it in your own words but include only three or four biblical texts (I know this is challenging). Try to be concise while clearly representing the six essential elements.

Engaging the incredible resources of EvanTell, the grace-based evangelism ministry in Dallas, would greatly encourage this step as well as the next step in our study. Explore them at evantell.org and add greater levels of confidence to your conversations.



Group Discussion:

1. Discuss your thoughts and challenges on this week's study with your small group.
2. Fill your small group in on your progress in this week's training practice.
3. Have you believed some bad gospel messages? What was confusing about the Gospel in your past? Do you have any doubt that you will go to heaven when you die?
4. What is the difference between justification and sanctification? How should a good Gospel presentation maintain this critical difference?
5. In addition to the 11 texts shared in this chapter, what are some additional biblical texts that you could use to share the Gospel? Are they clear and helpful?
6. Have you found any illustrations to be helpful in sharing the Gospel with others? Has anyone ever shared one with you? Was it biblical, helpful and true? How might these kinds of tools be useful?
7. How would you define grace? What is the biblical role of grace in the Gospel?



CHAPTER 5

Telling The Story

CHAPTER 5

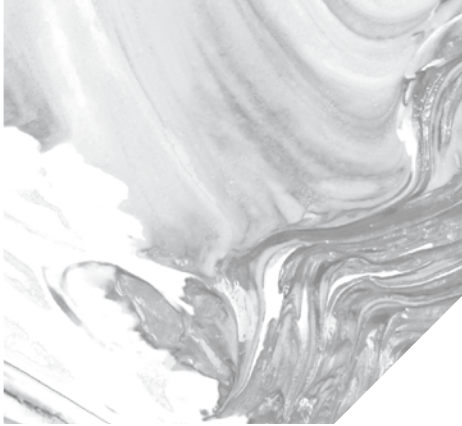
Telling The Story

Hopefully in this study you have been encouraged and trained in simple truths and practices that build both your confidence and passion to share the Gospel and your personal story of faith. Make no mistake, you do not have to pass a certain year-marker as a Christian to begin telling your story and sharing the Gospel. You can begin immediately after you believe in Jesus for yourself. In fact, this can be the most powerful time to do so. This is exactly what happened in one of my favorite chapters of my favorite Gospel, the Gospel of John chapter 4.

Jesus was traveling with His disciples, moving from the south in Judea, to the north in Galilee. While every devout Jew would bypass the controversial land and people in between, the Samaritans, Jesus chose to go through. This was unusual and potentially dangerous for His reputation. So Jesus,

“left Judea and went away again into Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob’s well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.” For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.” –John 4:3-8

Not only was Jesus trekking on controversial land, now He finds Himself alone, speaking with a woman. In Jesus’ time not only was this unconventional, it was unacceptable. Jews didn’t associate with Samaritans. Men didn’t speak to women, especially unfamiliar women. But the story continues.



*"Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."
-John 4:9-14*

Notice what is happening in the story. It is told in an active narrative fashion, as if it is being played out right in front of you.

*"The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus *said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." The woman *said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the*

*Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."
-John 4:15-26*

Wow. There were some serious subject matter changes in this exchange: water—husband—husbands—worship—Messiah—Jesus' identity. But watch what happens next.

*"At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" They went out of the city, and were coming to Him."
-John 4:27-30*

Now remember, why did the woman come to the well? To get water. Duh. What did Jesus first offer her in conversation? Living water, which is an illustration or picture of salvation by faith. After their conversation, what did the woman leave behind at the well when she departed? She left her waterpot. And what did she do next? She simply went to tell others about Jesus and what He had done for her.

While this magnificent story is not primarily recorded as an example of evangelism or storytelling, it beautifully relates both within the context of strangers. Can you say that you know less about Jesus than this Samaritan woman? Can you say that you have less to offer than her? I think not. If she can take a simple message of Jesus to others, you can too.



See the Samaritan woman's statement to the men of the town again. ***"Come, see a man who has told me all of the things I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?"*** In a beautifully reduced and simple way, this unnamed woman combined her story with the truth (in the process of being understood, to be sure) about Jesus.

Combining Your Story with the Gospel

Expanding on this episode in John 4, this week we will work on combining your story of faith with a clear presentation of the Gospel. Together, these two pieces form the full story God has equipped you to tell, both *your* story and *the* story of the Gospel. We will add to this work a heaping measure of prayer and the confidence that comes with clarity and biblical accuracy.

Consider this combination of stories in a sandwich pattern: the first part of your story—a clear Gospel presentation—the remainder of your story. This approach is natural and casual. It is easy to remember and deeply conversational. The real power is knowing when to pause to clearly explain the Gospel for your listener. This moment is most appropriate when you first introduce how and when you put your trust in Jesus. So working with the elements you've handled in previous weeks, consider the sandwich like this:

- 1. Where were you before you trusted Jesus?**
- 2. How did you come to understand the Gospel?**
 - *What is the clear, simple Gospel? (6 parts)*
- 3. What difference has Jesus made in your life?**
 - *Call for a response (see next page)*

“ I remember the time when my wonderful wife challenged my beliefs about God. I was upset at the thought of my family not sharing my religion, so I picked up the Bible to understand what I believed. Shortly thereafter, some dear friends invited us to a Bible church where I heard the message of the gospel for the first time. After about a month, I heard a sermon on Titus 2:11-14 which changed my life forever. It was then when I understood and accepted God's gift of grace in Jesus.”

—Mark

This simple structure beautifully and perfectly weaves your story with the story of Jesus. It is merely arranging the work you've already done in an intentional way. Don't forget the six essential parts of the gospel message. Always include Scripture, but not 27 passages. Choose a few passages you like and ones that are easy to understand. Opening a physical Bible and letting the other person read the passage can be a very powerful practice.

Calling for a Response

What is keeping you from trusting in Jesus Christ right now? This massively important question must be presented for a Gospel presentation to be complete. This question is decidedly different than the more comfortable, *"Do you understand what I've said?"* While this question is also important, it must not replace the most important one: *"What is keeping you from trusting in Jesus right now?"*

After the conclusion of your story and the Gospel, ask this question and pause for an answer. While in no way are you trying to "close a sale" or play the salesperson, you must consider that a real invitation doesn't exist unless it is followed by: *Will you respond?* If you were throwing a special party for your friends, you probably wouldn't just tell them about all you've done to cook, clean, prepare, and decorate for the party. You would tell them they are invited and then you would ask, *"Will you please join me?"* Invitations require the opportunity to respond.

Jesus did this as well. When He interrupted the funeral of his good friend Lazarus, one of Lazarus' sisters came out to meet him. Martha boldly asked why Jesus delayed in coming. Jesus responded and said, ***"Your brother will rise."*** Martha misunderstood, so Jesus clarified. ***"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die."*** Then He asked the all-important question: ***"Do you believe this?"***

Martha's response is beautiful, but it probably wouldn't have come unless Jesus had asked. She said, "**Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.**"

-John 11:13-27

So after all the hard work of praying for people, praying through your life, organizing it in a relatable manner, clarifying the simple Gospel message, and combining all of it into one seamless story... don't forget to ask the most important question: "*What is keeping you from trusting in Jesus right now?*"

What to do When Someone Responds to the Gospel?

How do you respond if someone says they want to trust Jesus? First, rejoice! Don't freak out. The pressure is all on God. He does the saving. Focus on confirming and guiding the person when they express faith, affirmation or interest in accepting the offer of life in Jesus.

One way to do this is to pray. Now to be clear, prayer at this moment is not some magic formula, required to get it right or "make it stick." Prayer is simply a way to mark the moment and have the person express their own words to God. You can invite them to pray, in their own words, asking them to speak to God and tell Him yes, they've accepted His free gift of life. They can express in prayer that they choose to trust in Jesus, and thank God for saving them. If they're hesitant or fearful, encourage them that there is no right or wrong way to pray at this moment. Simply say yes, they put their trust in Jesus, and thank you. Remember, the offer of salvation is a free gift from God.

After the prayer, share John 5:24. Assure them that they have eternal life based on their faith. They have "crossed over from death to life" because they believe in Jesus. It is critical for the new believer to know what has

happened. They have been forgiven of all their sins (past–present–and future) because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Now the new believer with whom you are talking begins their journey as a disciple. They will want to know what to do next. Encourage them to get a good Bible and begin reading the Gospel of John. Ask if they have access or know of a good Bible-teaching church. Invite them to your church if they do not have one. Encourage them to investigate the full journey of discipleship in **FAITHPATH**. Perhaps the *Sit With Me* Bible Study would also be a helpful guide to their first steps as a believer and follower of Jesus. ▲



Training Practice:

This week you will bring all of your training and practice together and share the full combination of your story and the Gospel with two people. First, share it with a Christian friend, perhaps the same one you shared with in previous weeks. This time include a clear Gospel presentation and an invitation to respond (you'll have to pretend your Christian friend is not a believer).

God loves all people and pursues them out of His great love. With that same love in mind, this week you will attempt to organize a meeting with a non-Christian friend, perhaps one of the people on your prayer list from week one. This could be a simple coffee, a meal, or simply an invitation to your home.

While your story doesn't have to consume the entirety of your time together, your sharing should be intentional. A simple introduction like

this will work very well: “Well, I have been working on part of my personal story and one of the reasons I wanted to get together with you today is to share this story with you very briefly. Would that be okay?”

I know of no friend or acquaintance that would turn down that kind of invitation. Next, share your story as you planned and trained to do. Work to keep it around seven minutes. That is more than enough time. It’s even okay to have a simple note card to help if that boosts your confidence. Don’t forget to invite them to respond.

I know this can be an intimidating exercise, but remember, God is the one at work in hearts. Pray and connect with Him. Pray for your friend by name and for your time together. Remember, God’s Holy Spirit is in you, and He will speak through you with power, eloquence and passion. You can trust God to do His part while you faithfully do yours.

Share your experience with a close friend or your small group and celebrate your obedience.

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YOUR STORY

1. Where were you before you trusted Jesus?

2. How did you come to understand the Gospel?

- *What is the clear, simple Gospel? (6 parts)*

3. What difference has Jesus made in your life?

- *Call for a response*

THE STORY

1. Jesus as the Son of God

2. Jesus' death on the cross as a payment for sins

3. Jesus' resurrection from the dead

4. Your sinfulness and need of salvation

5. Faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for salvation

6. God's promise to save you as a free gift of His grace



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Group Discussion:

1. Discuss your thoughts and challenges on this week's study with your small group.
2. Fill your small group in on your progress in this week's training practice.
3. How has your level of confidence grown in the weeks of this study? What are you still concerned, worried or anxious about in regards to telling your story and sharing the Gospel?
4. **Read Matthew 10:16-20.** Now it is not likely that you will be scourged for your faith and testimony, but what does this text say about God's design and plan for your testimony of faith? What specifically does God give you when you share with others?
5. **Read Romans 1:13-17.** What was Paul eager to do? Why do you think he was not ashamed? How does this passage remind you of the ultimate goal in sharing *your* story and *the* story? How does it encourage you?
6. Do you have any lingering fears or insecurities about sharing *your* story and *the* story? If so, identify them to your group.
7. When it comes to sharing the Gospel with others, identify one specific prayer request for yourself. Ask your group to pray for you.

CHAPTER 6

Gospel Conversations

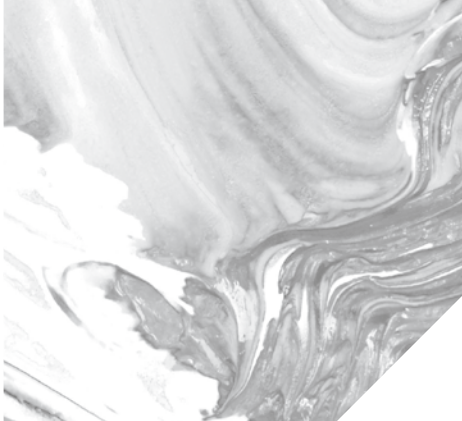
CHAPTER 6

Gospel Conversations

Some people are master conversationalists. It's absolutely astounding. Have you ever seen that woman who can perfectly navigate the spotlight of conversation attention between herself and the person with whom she is engaged. Not too much focus on her lest she appear self-centered, but also not too much attention on the other lest she feel controlling or deflective. She asks great questions and gives sublime answers; never straying into gossip or hearsay but always seeking perspective, insight and connection. For this woman, a deepening relationship is the goal, not winning a subtle war of words or stories. And her conversation partner feels like they have been known for years, like they've been hugged and helped all at the same time. Have you ever engaged with someone like this?

If you have, you remember it. Do you know why? Because this kind of individual is exceptionally rare. I'm talking scuba-diving-unicorn kind of rare. But as uncommon as these conversation masters are, all of their skills are learned. All of their abilities are transferrable. These skills are only rare because people don't take the time to learn them. You, yes you, can learn all that is necessary to be intentional in conversation and increase your relational intelligence.

Relational intelligence is all about you and another person. While you might think it is mostly about the other person, it is just as much about you. The relationally intelligent person relates to others with significant freedom from the trappings of competition, comparison and performance. This must occur in your heart first, which is why relational intelligence is about you too. If you are too concerned with winning or not failing then the



tone and shape of your relationships will be forced, limited and managed instead of led. Relational empathy and intention begin with a passion for other people, a true concern. You must see the other person as God sees them: a soul, a masterpiece, a fascinating and complex story that is still being written. This means that the other person cannot be a project or a puzzle to solve. They must first be highly valued. This value for the other actually begins with your humility. So relational intelligence starts inside of you and only then extends to the other. Outside of this framework, relationships will be shallow, competitive and unintentional.

As a pastor, I have a secret weapon when it comes to conversations, especially ones with strangers. It's the word "pastor." Drop that in a conversation with a new friend in seat 37C on a United flight to Chicago and things can get very awkward in record time.

"Oh, wow.... you design and build propellers for underwater search and rescue devices? That is amazing. I've never met anyone that did that. How did you get into that? I bet there are tons of different applications and exciting frontiers in that field."

"Yes, there is. I love it. It has taken me all over the world. I got hooked as a young kid when my uncle took me to an aquarium in Boston. I just was fascinated by the water and exploring it. When my skills lined up with engineering, I put the two together and got an internship. The rest is history."

"That sounds like a fun job. I'm excited for you."

"Thanks. What do you do?"

"I'm a pastor of a local church north of Houston, Texas."

"A... a... a pastor?"

"Yep. I love my job too. It's always changing and is very challenging."

"Okay... well... now, that's something..."

And... cue the coy smile, glance outside the tiny window and a reach for the noise cancelling headphones. It doesn't always go this way, but most of the time it gets weird.

To be sure, sometimes the word "pastor" has the opposite effect. Often people feel I can be trusted or that I will uniquely understand and they begin to dive deep or ask big questions. Because I'm not sure how it will be seen, I often choose to hold that weaponized word as long as I can, keeping the conversation topics on other things or on the other person. But once it's out, I have found that some feel immediately judged (based on past experiences), while others feel welcomed and safe. It is fascinating.

Chances are you don't have this secret word-weapon. You can't drop the word "pastor" and watch what happens in wonder. You need to learn other simple techniques to nudge a normal conversation to a more meaningful place. As you build confidence in your testimony and the Gospel, you will actually want to turn conversations to spiritual things. But exactly how do you do that?

Turning a Conversation Upward

Every conversation follows a path. Some of them are pre-planned and agreed upon, like the conversations in a team meeting about the big project you've been working on. Others are unplanned and have total

freedom in their route, like the unexpected meeting of old friends at the market or the chatty person next to you on the bus.

To create a simple and easy place to share your story and the Gospel, the conversation must be turned upward. By "upward" I mean "above the common." Upward conversations are not limited to discussions about God, Jesus, the Bible or salvation, but they do live above the basic details of life like weather and busyness and being "just fine."

One of the main goals in an upward conversation is to find a point of connection with God and your story of faith. Since your story of faith already has a place for a Gospel presentation, all you need to do is connect the conversation to a part of your story. For example, if someone shares they are struggling with a recent job loss and they allude to the fear and insecurity that is now a part of their reality, you may be able to easily jump to a time in your story when you went through a similar job loss or insecurity. If they express a deep pain or loss, perhaps you can relate. If they are dancing around deep questions or tensions, perhaps part of your story is relevant.

Let me be clear at this point. Do not force your story on someone else. This is not the goal. You are not trying to simply check the "I told my story" box. It would be uncomfortable to make it all about you. As the Holy Spirit leads, and as you develop a sensitivity to His leading, the opportunity to tell your story will present itself. But if "upward" is the goal, you will need to know how to turn a conversation this way.



“ I've attended church all of my life. But it was when a missionary came to visit our church and preach for a week that I accepted Christ as my Savior. I hung around the church a lot that week volunteering for odd jobs and he spent a lot of time with me, answering many questions and just showing Jesus' love to me as an individual. I was 13 years old. Many things instantly changed in my life that summer.”

—Ken

The Art of Asking Good Questions

Conversations are best guided by questions. Learning how to ask great questions is the single secret to turning random conversations into intentional, upward conversations. But it is not about asking one targeted, scripted, predetermined question. Your goal is to ask *good questions*. Remember Jesus and the Samaritan woman?

Moving from one side of the question spectrum to the other can happen quickly, smoothly and naturally if you are familiar with your goal and confident in your approach.

Let's talk about four levels of questions. Questions move on a spectrum from simple yes-no-questions on one end to the thought-provoking-not-easy-to-quickly-answer kind of questions on the other. Probing and clarifying questions are somewhere in between. Each class of questions offers various opportunities to steer a conversation in a specific direction, thus each offers a different size window to talk about the Gospel, Jesus and your story of faith.

A legal background check or a military interrogation may start with **yes-no-questions**, but these don't really move or shift conversation. Although they are not all answered by either a yes or a no, these simple questions are the easiest to ask. They don't require much of the question-er or the answer-er. "How are you?" "Did you finish your homework?" "What kind of coffee would you like?" These kinds of questions are often answered with one or two words. Fine. Okay. Good. Triple shot with foam.

Clarifying questions are one step up. They are excellent tools to deepen a conversation but only apply once the conversation is going. "What did you mean by that?" "I'm sorry, I didn't understand what you just said, can you please repeat that?" "You're talking about Bill now, right?" "Did you say 'the entire department'?" These kinds of clarifying questions serve to let the other person know you are listening and you are interested.

They focus on the person, the story, the context, the details. These serve as conversational currency in many ways. Asking these kinds of questions can build credibility and connection. They foster trust and intimacy. Husbands, take note.

Probing questions are the next level. These are asked by a person who understands what was said (no more need for clarification) but wants to know more and on a deeper level. The tone and direction of these probing questions are the first great opportunity to steer a conversation in a specific direction. "Can you tell me more about how you felt when that happened?" "How did that affect your trust of that person?" "That sounded like it was really hard. How is your heart doing now?" Probing questions tend to focus on the individual more than the story. They tend to go to the heart and soul of the issue.

Finally, **thought-provoking, heart-level questions** are the far end of the spectrum. These are the kinds of questions that you would feel very uncomfortable being asked by a stranger. They are not surface questions. They pierce the story and details, going directly to matters of the inner life, philosophy, theology, relationship, pain, hope, faith and hopefully, Jesus. "Where do you turn when things get that bad?" "Do you believe in a God that knows your struggles?" "Are you truly happy with your life?" "Do you have a faith that helps you handle life?" "What do you think about Jesus?"

Moving from one side of the question spectrum to the other can happen quickly, smoothly and naturally if you are familiar with your goal and confident in your approach. It's both an art and a science in many ways. To simplify what may already be too complex, think about using these four questions to intentionally move from the "lower" story to the "upper" story, from personal to common, to spiritual and uncommon. This can be a natural and easy transition. See the next page for some examples.



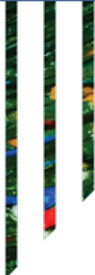
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First Step: Personal and Common

- *What was your family like growing up?*
- *Were you close to your sister?*
- *I bet that was really hard to handle. How is your heart now?*
- *How are you and your husband/wife doing?*
- *Are you close with your kids?*
- *What's your biggest dream?*

2

Second Step: Spiritual and Uncommon

- *Is faith an important part of your life?*
 - *Do you have a specific belief in God?*
 - *Did you grow up in a church?*
 - *What has your experience been with church or Christians?*
 - *What do you think about Jesus?*
 - *What is one specific thing I can pray for?*
- 

Don't forget to pray. Remember you are working with God in all of this. As you progress in a conversation, whether it is with a very old friend, a family member or a stranger, pray for God to create a space for your story, which includes a Gospel presentation and a call for a response. This can happen before you enter a planned time with a friend or silently and internally as you listen and engage in a live conversation. Inviting God and His leading into your conversation will help prevent you from seeing the other person as a project or a prize. They are a soul, a life. God loves them. Jesus died for them.

As you pray and direct the conversation, God will work. Look and listen for His leading. More often than not He will provide a touch-point, a pause, a natural transition or a point of connection. In that moment, simply ask a question. *"May I quickly share my story with you?"* Asked in such a way, and in the proper circumstances, you will not find many people who will say no. ▲



Training Practice: *Intentionally Shifting a Conversation*

This week, pay close attention to the conversations you have with your spouse, kids, friends, co-workers or even strangers. Try to stay “above” the conversation as an observer while you engage within it. Experiment with guiding the conversation by asking good questions.

Practice again with a Christian who knows you very well. Don’t see them as an experiment or a project, but use the conversation to practice navigation. Since sharing the Gospel is not as critical with someone who is already a believer, use this freedom to try to guide the conversation to more personal matters and deeper questions. As you talk with your friend, intentionally try to identify one deeply personal and specific prayer request.

Finally, prayerfully organize a conversation with someone you are praying for. Take your time and work to naturally and graciously guide the conversation from personal matters to spiritual matters. Pray that God gives you an opportunity to share your story and the Gospel.

This is how Jesus lived every day. We see ample evidence of this in the Gospels. Don't you think it would be a blessing to live and interact with others as Jesus did?





Group Discussion:

1. Discuss your thoughts and challenges on this week's study with your small group.
2. Fill your small group in on your progress in this week's training practice.
3. Who is the best conversationalist you know? Why are they so good, in your opinion? What about their approach makes you feel comfortable? What can you learn?
4. How has this study equipped you to confidently share your story and the Gospel? What are the three most influential tools or strategies you've learned? Share with your group.
5. How are you currently praying for the lost around you? How does your prayer life reflect a willingness and desire to share your story with others?
6. What is your plan for applying what you've learned in this study to your everyday life?
7. Identify three practical things that you will do next and share them with your group.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scot Pollok is a graduate of Texas A&M University, where as a freshman, he first understood the Gospel and trusted in Jesus Christ. He then earned his Masters of Theology degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. He has worked in the ministry since 1994. Currently, he serves as Lead Pastor of Faith Bible Church in The Woodlands, Texas. He is married to Liza and has two children, Andrew and Isabel.

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