

MY STORY, THEIR STORY, GOD'S STORY

The Importance of Stories

1. Stories are found throughout *history*.
2. God is writing *stories* with you each step of your life.
 - He knew you before you were born. (Jeremiah 1:5)
 - He created you wonderfully. (Psalm 139:14)
 - He has wonderful plans for your life. (Jeremiah 29:11)
 - He has good works for you to accomplish. (Ephesians 2:10)
 - He is with you every step of your journey. (Matthew 28:20)
3. Your story is unique and special because you were created in the *image* of *God*. (Genesis 1:27)
That means you *reflect* God uniquely.
4. Your personal story has shaped your life and your relationships:
 - How you experience *love*.
 - How you relate to *others*.
 - Bottom line, stories enable us to *relate* well with others.
5. We are called to enter into the stories of others.

We can help others learn from their own stories.

We can teach others about the great story of God.

Entering the stories of others is our vital mission. (Matthew 28:18-20)

When you enter the stories of others, you are on sacred ground. Walk carefully and listen well. It is important to not judge but reflect their story back to them so they know you are truly listening.

MOTIVATIONAL THEMES

And that's possible because of our own stories. Stories enable us to connect with others because most life stories fit within one or more of the **following five Motivational Themes**.

Theme 1: Peace / Satisfaction / Freedom from Anxiety.

Theme 2: Success / Significance / Ultimate Purpose in Life.

Theme 3: Love / Belonging / Acceptance.

Theme 4: Forgiveness / Sense of Worth / Freedom from Insecurity.

Theme 5: Happiness / Pleasure / Enjoyment.

REFLECT AND DISCUSS

1. Which one or two of the five motivational themes "jumps out at you" immediately?
2. What is one word that describes your attitude growing up?

"Stories make up more than 70% of the Bible, and it is in the stories of our lives that we can spot God's handiwork." --Dr. Dan Allendar, Author and Counselor

FIVE IN FOCUS

- Write down the names of five of your friends or acquaintances who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Next to each name, make a first attempt at identifying a recurrent motivational theme in his/her life. You might have to guess, which is perfectly acceptable at this time.
- We find that our sovereign God often orchestrates our lives so that we intersect with people on our prayer list in ways that allow us to ask questions about their stories. These are chances to start identifying potential motivational themes in their lives. Pray for such divine appointments with the people on your Five in Focus list.

NAME

MOTIVATIONAL THEME (YOUR BEST GUESS)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

My story is important not because it is mine, God knows, but because if I tell it anything like right, the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is also yours ... It is precisely through these stories in all their particularity, as I have believed and often said, that God makes Himself known to each of us most powerfully and personally. If this is true, it means that to lose track of our stories is to be profoundly impoverished not only humanly but also spiritually.

-- Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets*

FOUR KEY QUESTIONS

1. What was my attitude before I took Jesus Christ seriously?
2. Why did I say “yes” to Jesus Christ?
3. How did I say “yes” to Jesus Christ?
4. What difference does Christ make in my day-to-day life?

CREATING SOUND-BYTES

1. We often don't have time to tell our whole story.
2. We need to be prepared to relate short, interesting pieces of our stories when given the opportunity.
 - They should be specific.
 - They should be honest.
 - They should be free of jargon.

ENGAGE

1. What was my attitude before I took Jesus Christ seriously? Does my answer help others identify with me? Is my motivational theme evident?
2. Why did I say “yes” to Jesus Christ? Would someone else know how to say “yes” from this description?
3. How did I say “yes” to Jesus Christ? Would someone else know how to say “yes” from this description?
4. What difference does Christ make in my day-to-day life? Is the difference clearly because of God's work and not my own? Have I connected the changes in my life to my motivational theme? Have I avoided making the Christian life sound perfect and trouble-free?

Take 20 minutes to think about your responses to the four questions. Write some words or phrases to the four questions, then share and evaluate them with one another in your group.

In the following space refine your story so that you can share it with others in a conversation using the four questions.

WHAT was my attitude before I took Jesus seriously?

WHY did I say yes to Jesus?

HOW did I say yes to Jesus?

WHAT difference does Jesus make in my day-to-day life?
