

Session 2: God's Story and Our Story (The 'Why' of Discipleship)

Head

Heart

Hands

ENVISIONED

"Christians grow when we have a clear vision of God, ourselves, and everyday faith that has spiritual growth as an obvious and desirable consequence".

SUBMITTED

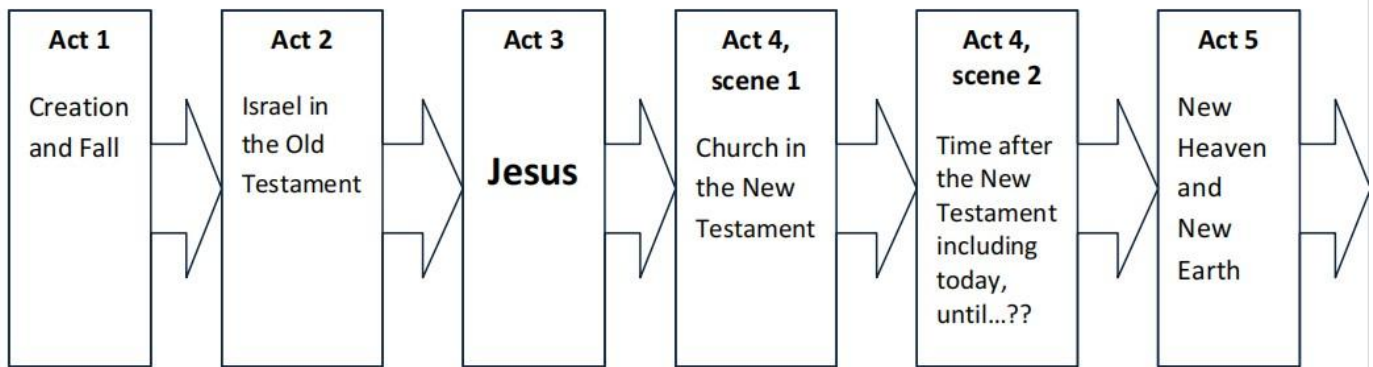
"Christians grow as we continue to choose to lay down our will for the sake of God's."

The Point of the Session

- As we grow as disciples and enable others, it can be valuable to keep reflecting on...
 - WHY God calls us into his Kingdom (what is the 'big story' of salvation in the Bible?)
 - WHY we have chosen to follow Jesus, and why we still follow him
 - HOW God's story and our story intersect
- Together we are practicing honest sharing of the stories of our journeys of discipleship, with all their ups and downs
- Reflecting together on why we are Christians is important because it...
 - Keeps us focused on the core messages of the Gospel and God's purposes for Creation
 - Renews our joy and excitement as to why we follow Jesus
 - Helps prevent Christian discipleship simply becoming a list of tasks or activities
 - Helps us understand how to live faithfully in the present, in the light of the 'big story'
 - Encourages others, as we share our joy in the Gospel, but are also realistic about the challenges
 - Helps us begin to build up trust and friendship as a group, when we share honestly and openly together

Key Bible Passages

- Psalm 71
- John chapter 1
- Ephesians 1-3
- 1 John 1.1-4



Adapted from: Tom Wright, 'How can the Bible be Authoritative?' *Vox Evangelica*, 1991, 21, 7–32 (http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm#_ednref5) and Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: the Drama of Christian Ethics* (2004)

Core Session Content 1: God's WHY

- **Discipleship Story:** the importance of stories to the rabbits of *Watership Down*
- One accessible way of talking about what God is doing in creation: the 'big story' of the Bible in five 'chapters':
 - - Creation
 - - Fall
 - - Old Testament covenant
 - - Jesus
 - -Kingdom, Church, Great Commission, New Covenant, New Heaven and New Earth
(see alternative version above)
- We are part of this story (after Pentecost and the end of the NT, before the 'new heaven and new earth').
- Thinking of ourselves within this 'big story' can help guide and orientate us for how we live out God's Kingdom life today:
 - Confidence that God is in control of history (even when it doesn't seem like it)
 - Strengthened by reflecting on how God has helped his people in the past
 - Identity as followers of Jesus from being part of this big story
 - Guidance from the story so far and its ending for living faithfully today ('faithful improvisation')
 - Hope for the future, from how the story will end.

Questions and Space for Notes...

How helpful do you find it to think of the 'big story' of the Bible in five chapters?

How else might you describe that 'big story' to others in an accessible way?

What clues does this 'big story' give you about how we are to live as Christians today?

How well do you think people in your church/group know the 'big story' of the Bible?

What might help your church/group go deeper into this 'big story' together?

Main Session Content 2: Our 'WHY'

- In the New Testament we see many people's own stories changed as they meet Jesus and encounter God's 'big story' - e.g., 1 John 1.1-4.
- The same is true for us!
- Each of us came to faith for different reasons.
- Our reasons for following Jesus today may also have changed over our lives.
- There's much value for us in regularly reflecting back on our stories of faith, how God has helped us through the ups and downs.
- Importance of being real and honest about our stories.
- Where we can find joy in our stories can be inspiring and encouraging to others.
- Joy often seen as a hallmark of the fruitful Christian life (e.g., 'the chief end of [humanity] is to worship God and enjoy him forever' (Westminster Confession), and an essential quality of a catechist/discipleship enabler (e.g., Augustine).
- That DOESN'T mean wearing a mask, enforced jollity or treating others as second-class Christians if they don't seem joyful enough!
- It DOES mean reflecting on 'the hope we have in Jesus', remembering why the Gospel is genuinely good news for us, and letting this change us.

Questions and Space for Notes...

What first inspired/attracted you to explore Christian faith? Have your reasons for following Jesus changed over your life?

Where do you find joy in faith? What makes you come alive as a Christian?

Is your church/group known for its joy? How might joy and celebration become more of a part of your church's/group's life?

Practice or Tool to Try:

Sharing your Discipleship Story

- **Sharing your Story.** Hearing stories of faith can offer powerful encouragement and learning. Becoming used to sharing your own story of faith honestly and vulnerably can also encourage others. You will have about 15-20 minutes to share your story (depending on group size). Stories can include...
 - Moments when you have surrendered to God.
 - Times when you have paid attention to God and responded.
 - How God has used important life events to grow you.If you wish, you can use the **Spiritual Journey Map practice** (below) to help you develop your discipleship story. You don't need to share any details you don't want to share.

Spiritual Journey Map/Path

To help you reflect on and share your story, you are invited to create a map of your own journey of Christian discipleship so far. You can draw it on a blank sheet of paper or create a 3D model if you're feeling particularly creative! No artistic skill is required, but equally, you can make your maps as beautiful as you like. This practice offers one way of beginning to reflect on how our own personal stories fit within God's big story.

Although seeing life with God as a journey isn't the only way to describe Christian discipleship, it can be a helpful way – there are many spiritual and literal journeys in the Bible. In fact, one name for the early Christians was 'followers of the Way' (e.g., Acts 9.2, 22.4).

Reflecting on the journey of discipleship and our own Christian journeys can also be an important source of:

- **Gratitude** - for what God has done for us in our lives so far
- **Honest reflection** - on regrets, painful experience or learning from the past
- **Encouragement** in the present and **hope** for the future. God is always 'doing a new thing'

Each of these are important in growth in discipleship. It may also help with thinking about how to share your story with other group members.

Step by Step Guide:

- Start with a short time of prayer or silence to gather your thoughts. You might like to read Psalm 71 in preparation - the writer is remembering God's faithfulness throughout their life.
- Working on your own, create a map or timeline representing your own personal life journey and how God and being a Christian is woven into your story. Think about:
 - How will you illustrate the different ups and downs of life in your map/timeline?
 - What are the key turning points on the journey so far?
 - What has the path been like at different times? Rough or smooth? Clear or sometimes hard to see?
 - Who else have you met on the journey? Who else are you travelling with?

- Where is God on this map? Are there particular points at which you have particularly encountered God or felt God's guidance?
- Who are you following? Is anyone following you?
- What has sustained you on the journey? You could add a rucksack with these things in.

Once you have finished your first draft, share it with another trusted person or group. It may be that as you tell your story and others ask questions, new insights or patterns will emerge. You could add these to your map or timeline - perhaps using a different colour?

This map/timeline may provide you with some of the raw material for sharing your discipleship story with the rest of the group in the Retreat Day.

Reflecting on your life journey so far can arouse a range of emotions from happiness and thankfulness to sadness, regret or worse. If this reflective activity has stirred up strong or traumatic memories for you, talk it over with a friend, minister or spiritual director, and seek professional help if need be. Your well-being matters.

This activity is inspired by Sally Welch, *Mapping your Spiritual Journey* (Canterbury Press, 2024).

Enabling Tips: Do's and Don'ts for Story-Sharing

Experts in oral history/ reminiscence for elderly people have various tips for good story-sharing:

DO:

- ☑ Find out in advance if people are used to sharing their stories in church
- ☑ Create an atmosphere of safety/trust
- ☑ Treat people's stories with respect and discretion
- ☑ Encourage people to bring a photo, object or spiritual journey map they can talk about, if helpful
- ☑ Give people time and space to talk - 'hear them into speech'
- ☑ Make sure your body language communicates your interest/attention
- ☑ Say there's no single right way of sharing your story
- ☑ Ask occasional questions to help people expand on their stories
- ☑ Affirm and encourage people that their story is valuable and interesting.
- ☑ Be attentive to power dynamics
- ☑ Thank people for sharing

DON'T:

- ☒ Share other people's stories without their permission (exception: safeguarding concerns)
- ☒ Hurry or interrupt people
- ☒ Look bored, distracted or check your phone.
- ☒ Correct, criticise or grill people
- ☒ Become overly analytical. If invited to make observations about someone else's story, express your subjective opinion - e.g., 'I wondered...' or 'I thought I noticed that...'
- ☒ Express your opinion as though it was a statement of fact