

Life Community Leader Training – Spiritual Autobiographies

Facilitating the Story Telling Process

(Adapted from “Spiritual Storytelling” - Leadership Transformations, Inc.)

A. Preparing Your Life Community

1. Explain why we are sharing “life stories” – how it fits in with the Relational Redesign Series.
2. Introduce Handout – Making Space for One Another – Telling Our “Life Story”
3. Although story telling is voluntary, encourage each person to share their story.
4. Highlight that they are to share only what they choose and from a place of “unforced authenticity”. What they decide to tell about their life is of their choosing.
5. Emphasize that they will be sharing their story in a safe place where they can trust in the confidentiality of one another and with the “raw material of their lives.”

B. At the Start of Each Week – And/Or Before Each Person Begins to Share Their Story:

1. Highlight that our stories matter to each other and to our communities and that God is at work in every story.
2. Remind story tellers they are not to feel pressured to go to a place they do not want to go.
3. For those listening to the story remind them (to):
 - a. Listen from the soul level so that they can respond from a heart level – that this is different from listening from a shallow level in order to respond from the mind and give advice, add to the story, compare the story to theirs or outdo their story.
 - b. Listen to what is going on inside them in response to the story. There is something of God in each story, something for the community and for individuals.
 - c. When they speak they should do so without compulsion and only when nudged to do so from the Holy Spirit – not from a place of nervousness, curiosity or feeling a need to fill silence. It s ok to remain silent if that is how they feel God is leading them. They should hold back any curiosity they have regarding the details of what they heard.
 - d. Ponder in their hearts what has been said before speaking, listening for God, the unique person in the story and for what they themselves are to receive.

C. The Telling of Stories - (15 minutes)

1. Have a way of keeping track of time, using discernment as you apply this guideline. You may find some persons need a few minutes longer to complete their story in a natural manner so that they do not feel “unfinished.”
2. Sit silently for a moment, pray for the story teller, tell them they can begin when they wish.

D. Reflection Back to the Story Teller - (15 minutes)

Do not rush this part of the process. Provide space for silence, for attending to the work of the Spirit within the souls of community members. If you “rush” to fill silence between speakers others will respond in like kind.

1. At the end of each story thank the story teller for their story.
2. Ask the following 2 questions, one at a time. As the facilitator you will want to contribute responses as well. Although the leader, you are also a member of the community. Avoid being the first to speak.
 - a. What did you hear? (verbally, actual words, emotionally, spiritually, relationally)
 - b. As you sit prayerfully, what word of encouragement do you sense the Spirit inviting you to offer to this person? What do you sense you are being invited to speak into their soul?

As words of encouragement are shared have one person write down what is expressed and give these “words” to the story teller upon completion of the closing prayer – item 3 below.

3. Pray for the story teller.
4. You will likely want to take a “stretch break” after the first 2 stories.

E. Wrap Up & Celebration

1. Each week affirm those who have shared their stories. Close in prayer.
2. At the end of the 4 weeks affirm everyone, including those who did not share their story. Spend time discussing what they noticed as they listened to the stories. For example, common themes, threads, how they saw God at work, giftedness within the community, etc.

What to be Aware of:

This may be the first time a person shares their story publically. Some may tap into their feelings as they get in touch with the depth of what they are giving voice to. Your response as a leader is critical, both during and after the story telling when this happens. Allow the person to process their emotions in the moment, continuing when they are ready. Avoid rushing in with words. You may want to “come alongside” them individually during the “break” or at the end of the evening with words of encouragement. You do not want them to leave regretting that they told their story or feeling they made themselves too vulnerable. Do not seek to find out more.

Making Space for One Another - Telling Our "Life Story"

Beginning January 18 and for the next four weeks we will be "making space" to receive the gift of one another's "life story". This will be a time of listening with our souls to the sacred story of those within our Life Community and of encouraging one another as we see God at work in a unique way. It will be a time of discovering how much our stories have in common and of being blessed by all we will hear and experience together.

The Bible is filled with "life stories" of men and women of all ages and backgrounds. As we read and listen to them we notice how all of them are laced with "the stuff of life", or as some say, the "highs and lows" of living. We discover "life stories" in which men and women experienced great intimacy with their Creator, encountered God in the day to day, sometimes in dramatic ways, saw His hand at work in their circumstances and surroundings, received his mercy, grace, compassion and comfort, were filled with gratitude, enjoyed great accomplishments, basked in the joys and challenges of family and relationships. We also discover stories in which many of these same men and women wrestled with God, faced great sorrow, discouragement and suffering, took wrong turns, faced betrayal, experienced "failure", questioned where and who God was in the midst of confusing times, and more. In all of these highs and lows we discover men and women being shaped by God and we discover something else - their stories are like our own.

There is a bit of preparation you will need to do before you share your story. The time you invest in preparing will be of great advantage as you give voice to your life experiences.

Reflect back upon your life and:

1. Come ready to share 3 HIGH and 2-3 LOWS of either: (a.) your whole life, (b.) b. your adult life OR (c.) your Christian life. Preferably experiences that have shaped you as a man/woman of God and have marked your spiritual life in a significant way. What you choose to share is your free choice.
2. Prepare some kind of visual representation of what you are sharing. This can be in pictures, drawings, photographs, etc. The simpler the better. Stick figures are fine. Something that visually tells of what you are giving voice to in your life/adult life/Christian life.
3. Be prepared to share for 15 minutes. Time limitations will require that we adhere to this time frame carefully. You may wish to "practice" telling your story beforehand to ensure you are able to fit within this guideline all you wish to share.

We all have a story to tell and to share our story is a sacred task. Don't be surprised if you rediscover God at work in your life in ways you may have forgotten or notice His presence in ways you may not have even recognized before. Our stories are filled with God.

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