



Session 1:

Connecting through story

Preparation



- You'll need large sheets of paper, crayons and/or drawing materials for each member to complete their story exercises. We encourage the facilitator to have completed your River of Life story before the session. (See p. xx for how to do this).
 - Ensure your technology is set up and "Small Group Resource: Session 1" is ready to play.
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Group check-in (5 min)



1. What's your favourite story – book or film?
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Setting the scene (4 min)



If you can't show the video (found in the back of this resource or online at www.church.whatsyourstory.org.za), read "From disconnected to connected" below aloud to your group.

Watch: From disconnected to connected

OR

Read: From disconnected to connected



Read: From disconnected to connected

Despite sitting next to one another during Sunday services, worshipping side by side and attending Bible studies or small groups together – we often don't really know the people in our churches.

If we don't know those within our own spiritual family, how can we reach people beyond our church?

Growing in community means being able to share our stories and hear other people's stories so we can understand our connection to a bigger story. We need to see ourselves, and others, as part of God's cosmic love story.

When we share stories, we start to understand one another better. Stories bring healing and reconcile us. My story becomes connected to your story. And, together, our story is richer, stronger, and more inclusive.

Stories allow us to discover more about people's journeys and what has made them who they are. We also start seeing the reasons behind the things that sometimes divide us, and discover new things to unite us.

Over the next few sessions, we'll engage with various stories: our own, the stories of other members in this group, the stories of those in our families and our extended congregation, and stories of those beyond our church. Think of this as a crash course in the power of stories.

We'll use scenes from the Heartlines film, Beyond the River, real-life video stories and testimonials, practical exercises, and Bible-based discussions.

The aim of What's Your Story? is to build values of understanding, curiosity, empathy and love, and a culture of honour through sharing stories. We'll do this by creating a safe space for story-sharing using a tool called Ask. Listen. Tell.

Our hope is that, through this process, every member in this group feels heard, seen, better understood, and a lot more connected.

From there, we'll find ways to create a habit, lifestyle, and culture of getting to know the stories of people we interact with daily.

Sometimes moving from feeling disconnected to connected, from strangers to friends, from fellow Christians to spiritual family, starts with one simple question: "What's your story?"



Icebreaker: Do you know my name? (8-10 min)

Getting to know one another's stories begins with simply asking a question. Some of us may know one another well, and some may not. Everyone take a turn to answer:

1. What's your full name? Is there a story behind your name?
What does your name mean to you?



Practice: Ask and Listen (8-10 min)

In the video, we heard that asking and listening form the basis for sharing our stories. When we listen to someone, we acknowledge that everyone has a story worth sharing; we acknowledge their humanity.

Listening to someone's story is an act of love and respect. As truly listen to someone, we communicate several things:

"I respect you."

"What you're telling me is important."

"I acknowledge that you are created and loved by God."

We're going to do two short exercises on the power of listening.

Exercise 1: A time you weren't listened to

(discuss in pairs; max 4 min)

- Think of a time when you felt you weren't listened to (it could be at work, in your family, at a shop, etc.).
- Split into pairs and take turns sharing your story of not being listened to. The listener must try identify two things: what the person(s) in the story did that demonstrated they were not listening, and, what impact this had on the speaker.
- After both have shared, come up with a short list of ideas of what poor listening vs good listening looks like by reversing what happened in the stories.

Exercise 2: Getting to know you (discuss in pairs; max 6 min)

In the same or new pairs, we'll now take turns being the asker and the listener. Using some of the principles of good listening vs poor listening, the first asker asks one of the questions below; and then the other person gets a turn.

At the end of the sharing, the listener has a chance to summarise what the asker has said. The asker should also give feedback on how accurate the summary was, to see if the listener really understood what they were saying.

Questions:

1. What is one of your favourite memories of when you were growing up? What made it special? OR
2. Which person had the most impact on your life when you were young – and why?



If time permits, allow members to share what they've discovered through the exercise.



Read: John 8:1-11 (12 min)

Read the scripture together.

1. From this reading, what do we notice about Jesus when it comes to asking and listening?
 2. Can you think of other examples in Scripture when Jesus modelled an example of sharing in someone's story? What can we learn from His example?
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Tell and Listen (10 min)

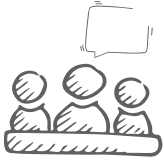
During the sessions, we're going to get an opportunity to share in one another's stories. There are many different ways to tell our stories (see some examples at the back of this resource or in your Participant's Workbook).

In the next session we'll discuss the importance of embracing our own stories. This exercise is a starting point in that journey.

Spend the next 10 minutes reviewing the different story-sharing methods and then start outlining your own story. If you don't finish during the allocated time, this exercise can be completed at home.



Give members 10 minutes to draw their River of Life story or whichever story-sharing method they choose. Give everyone a large sheet of paper and some pens/coloured pens or crayons where possible, and read the description of the chosen method found on p. xx.



Tell: Facilitator shares their story (10-15 min)

After the facilitator has shared their story, members may want to affirm them in one of the following ways:

- Say an encouraging word or identify something that inspired you from their story. You can also write it down for the person to take home.
 - Say a short prayer thanking God for the person's life and asking for His direction in some of the areas of challenge they may have shared about.
 - If time permits, you can offer the opportunity to ask the person questions.
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Go beyond

In the week ahead, we encourage you to practise some of the listening techniques you've learnt today on your family, friends or colleagues. If you haven't yet, please complete your River of Life at home and come ready to share your story over the next few sessions.



Ask for a volunteer or nominate someone to share their story in the next session. This will help them to be prepared.



Close in prayer.