



# WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

A first step to loving your neighbours  
through sharing in one another's stories



A resource for Christian small groups

HEARTLINES



# WHAT'S STORY?

An initiative of

**HEARTLINES**

**The Centre for Values Promotion**

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# What's Your Story? for Small Groups

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Find all the videos and downloads needed to run this course at

[www.church.wysza.org](http://www.church.wysza.org)



## Have you heard the story about that small-group leader?

Let's call him Joshua.



Joshua has been leading a small group at church for years, but he's worried because no matter how many guests visit the group, they don't stay. In fact, he's starting to wonder if any of the people in his group actually like each other. They rush to leave as soon as the session ends, and the regular members seldom sign up for any church events or ministries.

He wishes he had new ways to help the group connect, but truth be told, he has his own things to deal with at the moment. He recently became a dad and feels overwhelmed by this new role. He would love to get some advice from an older man, but he and his dad don't have the easiest relationship. Joshua's dad has been a good grandfather, but it's like he doesn't know how to speak to his son.

Why do relationships have to be so complicated, Joshua wonders? Why can't people just 'get' one another and know how to relate?



## Or the story about the woman

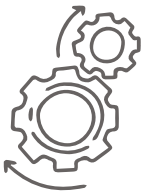
who recently joined a church? We'll call her Rachel.



Rachel has just moved to town and has signed up to join a small group at her new church. She's quite excited about the group – the leader and his wife seem nice on her first visit. There are a few other people her age there, including someone who's in a similar profession. She's hopeful it'll be a good place to make friends.

But after a few weeks, she feels less convinced. The leader always seems a bit distracted in the sessions and she has to constantly remind him what type of work she does. Nobody is keen to make new friends; they seem content with their friendship cliques and rush home immediately after the session ends. At work, Rachel is also struggling to find her groove, but she has nobody to talk to about it.

**Did I hear God correctly about joining this church? she wonders. Or should I just try to make friends elsewhere?**



## **The truth: We're all longing for meaningful community**

There's a concerning trend in our technology-driven world: more and more people are starting to feel disconnected, isolated, lonely, unseen and unheard. Regardless of how many friends, fans or likes we have on social media; nothing compares to a kind word delivered in person from someone who cares for us, or the supportive hug of a real friend.

Sadly, in churches and small groups we have too many Joshuas and Rachels who are battling to find good relationships or a strong sense of community.



As Christians, we have a unique opportunity to be the type of friends and communities the world is longing for. In Mark 12:30-31, Jesus encourages us:



“And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”

Only through loving our neighbours as ourselves can a casual acquaintance become a brother or sister, and a stranger a friend. Jesus was the greatest storyteller of all time, and we believe that sharing in one another’s stories is the best starting point for loving our neighbours as Christ loved us.

*What’s Your Story?* is our invitation to you. It’s a tool that can help you build understanding, empathy, and a stronger sense of community in your small group, ministry, and beyond.

That way, the first place Joshua, Rachel – and all of us – will think to run to when we feel isolated, disconnected or alone; is our Christian community.



# WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

*What's Your Story?* is an initiative to build a stronger sense of community and connectedness through sharing in one another's stories. It's a tool that can be used as a first step to loving your neighbour in a practical way.

It was launched by Heartlines in 2016, and was spearheaded by the award-winning film, "*Beyond the River*", as well as being supported by various print, video and digital resources. We've conducted extensive research that shows the methodology of *What's Your Story?* is both effective and personally transformational.

Thousands of Christian leaders throughout South Africa and beyond have engaged with *What's Your Story?*





## What to expect from this resource

Welcome to *What's Your Story? for Christian Small Groups*. Thank you for joining us on this journey!

### Through this resource, we'll equip you and your small group to:

1. Create safe spaces to engage with the stories of the people in your group, using a process called 'Ask. Listen. Tell.'
2. Get to know the stories of people in your broader church or congregation, as well as in your own families.
3. Use the values and practice of story-sharing as a first step to loving your neighbours and inviting others in, especially those considered 'different'.
4. Over time, start building a culture of story-sharing and a stronger sense of community in your group and church.

Some leaders and facilitators may be familiar with our previous *What's Your Story? Church Toolkit* and five-session small group discussion on storytelling, which focused on reconciliation. This resource, *What's Your Story? for Christian Small Groups*, is different in that it is more skills-based, focuses more on building community, and includes a session on the *Beyond the River* movie. Feel free to use either of the two resources, or you can also run them both at different times of the year.

This resource offers small-group leaders a multimedia toolkit with various videos, exercises and discussions, and is broken down into four sessions:



### Session 1: Connecting through story

- How to move from being disconnected to connected through story-sharing.
- Exercises in asking and listening to one another.
- Members mapping their stories, and a facilitator or leader sharing their story.



### Session 2: My story. Your story. Our story.

- How to create safe spaces using Ask. Listen. Tell.
- The values and principles of asking and listening, and telling your story.
- Understanding my own story.
- Members sharing their stories.



### Session 3: Going beyond - the stories of others

- How to reach out to our neighbours or those beyond the group.
- Getting to know the stories of others, using clips and ideas from the film *Beyond the River*.
- Members sharing their stories.



### Session 4: Creating a culture of community

- How to create a culture of community through story-sharing.
- Practical ideas for how to love our neighbours and build community in, and beyond, our church.
- Members sharing their stories.





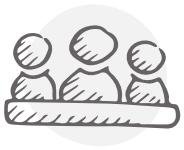
## How to use this resource

**Before you get started:** If you haven't yet, sign up and create your profile on our online resource platform [www.church.wysza.org](http://www.church.wysza.org). Once you've signed up, go to the **Courses** and you can access all the training videos and downloadable resources to run this course – at no cost.

- This resource comprises four sessions that can be run over four weeks, or concurrently over a weekend. It includes a DVD with videos and film clips, which is at the back of the print version. Alternatively, you can download all the videos from our online resource centre.
- There is also a participant's workbook for members – this can also be downloaded from the online resource centre.
- For each session you'll need: a DVD player, laptop or screen, and some materials specific to each session. If you don't have a way to show the videos, you can read the "Setting the scene" sections aloud to the group.
- The ideal running time for each session is 1.5 hours, but if you stick to our suggested time guides, you could run it in slightly over an hour. Remind all members that sticking to the timing guidelines allows everyone's voice to be heard.
- If your group or Bible study is bigger than eight people, we recommend breaking into smaller groups so each person can get a chance to share their story. You can do this within your bigger group, or set up a separate group for the four-week period. If you are unable to cover everyone's story over the four sessions, consider how you can incorporate their stories in your next meetings.
- For time purposes, some exercises are best done in pairs or trios, but there are also plenty of opportunities for larger group discussions.



Whether you're a new or seasoned leader, we encourage you to take a quick look at our tips for facilitating a small group. This will help your group get the most out of each session.



## Facilitating or leading a small group

We honour you for putting up your hand to facilitate a *What's Your Story?* small group! When we engage in story-sharing, it can be a scary and emotional process, but it can also be extremely rewarding and unifying. As the facilitator, you set the tone for how safe and empowered people feel to share their stories and engage respectfully with other people's stories.



**A facilitator or small group leader does not:**

- Have all the answers or need to be a trained expert.
- Exclude anyone or make anyone feel unwelcome.
- Talk so much that others don't get a chance.
- Show bias or special treatment to certain members.
- Break confidentiality.



**Your role as a facilitator or small group leader is to:**

- Welcome all members equally.
- Create a safe space for the exchange of ideas, opinions and stories.
- Help a group take a journey of discovery together.
- Model respect, trust, understanding and safety.
- Pray, pray, pray and prepare well.





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## FAQs about story-sharing

**Q: How do I help my group get the most out of each session?**

- Spend some time in prayer for the group.
- Before each session; read through the topic, including the Bible verses and discussion questions.
- Watch all the video clips ahead of each session.
- Encourage people to bring their Bibles, and remind the person or people who will be sharing their story in your next session at least one day beforehand.
- If you are unable to cover everyone's stories during the four sessions, decide as a group how you'd like to make space to hear the remaining stories.
- Stick to the timing guidelines as much as possible to ensure that group members get maximum benefit from each session.
- If one or two people dominate discussions, thank them for their contributions, and then specifically ask the less vocal members of the group what they think.
- Create an environment where people feel free to express their opinions.
- Honest emotions such as anger and discomfort are to be expected, but respect and honour should be the overarching values for everyone.



**Q: How should we respond when someone shares a particularly difficult story?**

Sometimes people share stories or have discussions that can bring up intense emotions or tensions in the group. Should any tension or conflict arise within your group; remind everyone of the values of respect, understanding and trust. As a facilitator, you are not there to change anyone's mindset or minimise their views. You are there to create a safe space for honest sharing.

Offer to spend further time in prayer with any individual who needs it, or advise them to have a follow-up meeting with your pastor or priest, or any leader trained in counselling or conflict resolution.

**Q: What if someone's story leaves another member feeling uncomfortable or emotional?**

If aspects of someone's story make you or another member feel angry or uncomfortable, it will be helpful to:

- Try and identify what it was that upset you. Ask yourself how their story touched on (or differs from) your own experiences, beliefs or assumptions.
- Think about that person's background and life; how might their experience of life have shaped the way they see things?
- Consider how your experience of life has shaped the way you see things. Is there something you could learn from their perspective?

It is very important not to judge or correct the storyteller, or interrogate them about their choices or actions. Even if you struggle to understand their perspective, hearing their story and reflecting on it in this way will help you grow in your capacity to relate to people who are different to you.

Where we have a variety of cultures and different generations, we are going to meet people whose norms and values differ from ours. It's not a case of who is right or wrong — we are just different and it's helpful to agree to see things differently. Finally, why not try meet with the person outside of the group in an informal setting so you can both get to know each other better? Getting to know people who are different to us takes time, effort and courage.

We also have another small-group resource available, *What's Your Story? for Reconciliation*. It focuses on how to use story-sharing as a way to build bridges across racial, ethnic and other divides. You can order it from the online resource centre.



**Q: What if someone shares a story of ongoing abuse, risk or suicidal thoughts?**

- Wherever possible, first request permission from the person sharing to get advice or counsel from a pastor or trustworthy leader. Be sure to maintain the rules of privacy and confidentiality as far as possible.
- Your leader or pastor can take the matter further or arrange a follow-up meeting with them.
- Speak to your ministry leader or pastor if you suspect a child or minor is at risk in any way.
- If they are at a loss about a way forward; they can contact the Heartlines team on [info@heartlines.org.za](mailto:info@heartlines.org.za), and we can connect them to a relevant organisation. We have a list of supporting resources on our online resource centre.



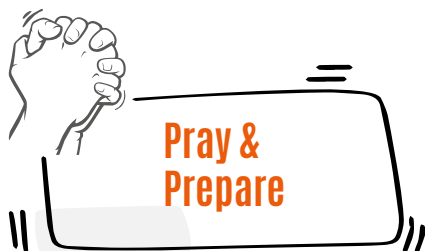
# Ready to get started?

## Your facilitator checklist



- Sign up and create your profile at [www.church.wysza.org](http://www.church.wysza.org)

- View, read and download all the materials you need for each session.



- Be prayed up and prepared.

- Make sure all your materials and technical aids are ready and working (if you don't have video facilities, keep this guide close by).



- Get ready for a great adventure in story-sharing.





# 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. 46 for how to do this).
  - Ensure your technology is set up and "Session 1: Connecting through Story" is ready to play.
- 



## Group check-in (5 min)

- What's your favourite story – book or film?
- 



## Watch video (4 min)

As a group, you can now watch the video, **Session 1: Connecting through story**.

(Note: The video can be found in the back of this resource or online at [www.church.wysza.org](http://www.church.wysza.org). If you can't show the video, read the script-version of the video out loud to the group.)

**Press play:** Session 1: Connecting through story  
Or

**Read:** Script-version: Connecting through story





## **Script-version: Connecting through story**

*(Read only if you are unable to watch the video)*

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 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*, a series of training videos, 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?"



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**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; the following:

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



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**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 we 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 to 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 the question 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.

**Question:**

- Which person(s) 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 and discuss the questions below.

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?
- 



### **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 on p. 46 of this resource or in your Participant's Workbook*).

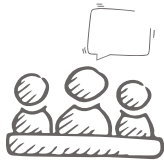
In the next session we'll discuss the importance of embracing our own stories. This exercise is a starting point in that journey.

Spend the next ten 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 ten 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. 46.*

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### **Tell: Facilitator shares story (10-15 min)**

The facilitator will now share their story with the group. Please take special note to stick to the allocated time as this will set the tone for others to share.

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**

For those who haven't yet done so, please complete your River of Life or whatever other story-sharing method you are using at home and come ready to share in the sessions ahead. We encourage you to practise some of the listening techniques you've learnt today on your family, friends or colleagues.



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*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.**



## Session 2: My story. Your story. Our story.



### Preparation

- You'll need large sheets of paper, crayons and/or drawing materials for members to complete their story exercises.
- Ensure your technology is set up and that "Small Group Resource: Session 2" is ready to play.



### Group check-in (5 min)

- What's one funny or unusual thing about you that few members in this group know about?



### Watch video (4 min)

As a group, you can now watch the video, **Session 2: My story. Your story. Our story.**

(Note: The video can be found in the back of this resource or online at [www.church.wysza.org](http://www.church.wysza.org). If you can't show the video, read the script-version of the video out loud to the group.)

**Press play:** Session 2: My story. Your story. Our story

Or

**Read:** Script-version - My story. Your story. Our story.



### Script-version: My story. Your story. Our story

(Read only if you are unable to watch the video)

Last session we learnt that *What's Your Story?* is a tool for building a stronger sense of connectedness and community through sharing in one another's stories. We also learnt about some of the principles of *Ask. Listen. Tell* in story-sharing.

Our objective in this journey is to get to grips with our own stories and the stories of others in our group. This process helps us gain skills to build a stronger sense of connectedness and community. We want to make sure that we're really getting to know one another.

Sharing our story with others is not always easy. Embracing our own story can be a challenging and uncomfortable process, but sharing our story can be a gift to ourselves - and to others. We know that stories are best shared in an environment of trust and mutual respect. We call these "safe, brave or courageous spaces."

We'll create safe spaces through the principles of Ask. Listen. Tell.

The first step in knowing someone's story is simply to ask. But remember these principles and **values as you ask:**

- Seek first to understand.
- Be curious, yet respectful.
- Ask without judgement.
- Be sincere.
- Affirm as you ask.
- Be willing to also be asked.

One of the most important ways to show someone respect is to listen to them. Many of us think we're good listeners, but it's important to regularly check how you are aligning to these **values as you listen:**

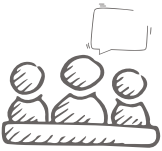
- Listen with your heart.
- Don't make it about you.
- Slow down as you listen.
- Don't judge.
- Don't interrupt.
- Ask clarifying questions, but only once the person has stopped talking.
- Don't give advice unless asked.
- Commit to maintaining confidentiality.
- Show empathy through an encouraging word or a prayer.



Once you've asked and taken the time to listen to someone share their story, also be ready for them to ask you to share your story. As you prepare to **tell your own story, remember these values:**

- Own your story.
- Be courageous and truthful.
- Only share as much as you feel comfortable to.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Be true to your emotions but be respectful.
- Be willing to be vulnerable.

Maintaining these values as you ask, listen and tell will help others feel heard, honoured and understood.



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### **Group discussion** (8-10 min)

1. Which of the values of Ask. Listen. Tell stand out for you or challenge you most?
2. In what other ways can we as a small group build a safe and courageous space for story-sharing?



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### **Understanding my own story** (10 min)

It's good to ask and listen to someone else's story – but we also need to be ready to tell our own story. Getting to grips with our own story can be quite an emotional process, and can raise a lot of questions: Where do I start? What parts do I include or omit? Do I even have anything worth sharing? Do I really feel ready to share that part of my life? What will they think of me after they've heard my story?

Author Brené Brown speaks about the importance of owning your story. Your story is yours, nobody else has the same story as you. Owning your story is a gift to yourself, and to others. You are an original, designed and created by our Heavenly Father. And your story matters to Him. In fact, your story is part of His big plan to reveal His love and glory to the world.

There are various ways to tell our stories. We have put together a list of helpful storytelling tools on p. 46 of this resource. Spend a few minutes reading through it and choose a method for telling your story.

Those who haven't yet done their storytelling exercise have the chance to do so now. Those who've already completed theirs can spend the next few minutes considering the following reflections (found on p. 29 of the Participant's Workbook):

- What have I learnt about my own story through this exercise?
- In which parts of my story can I clearly see how God was with me? Which parts would I like to invite Him into to heal, redeem, or celebrate with me?
- Which parts of my story are private to me – and which am I willing to share publicly?
- In which ways do I see my story as part of a bigger, interconnected story?

*Play some gentle, soft music and allow members five minutes to reflect on the questions, or to complete their stories. The aim is to give members an unrushed moment of contemplation.*



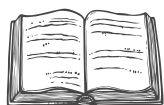


### **Tell: Sharing stories** (10-20 min)

*The group member selected in the previous session shares their story. If you have enough time, two members can share but make sure the time is equally distributed.*

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

- Say an encouraging word or identify something that inspired you from their story.
- 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.
- Write an encouraging word or blessing for them to take home.
- If time permits, you can offer the opportunity to ask the person questions.



---

### **Read: Hebrews 11:24-34** (10 min)

*Read the scripture together and discuss the questions.*

In Hebrews 11, we read all about the stories of the great heroes of faith. God was interested in their story as much as He is interested in your story.

1. Whose life story in the Bible resembles or reflects your own story, and in what ways? Or, whose story in the Bible currently inspires your own story?



## **Go beyond**

In the week ahead, why not do the River of Life or one of the story-sharing exercises with members of your family? You could have an interesting experience by doing it with different generations (grandparents, parents and grandkids). Or, ask someone you don't know that well at work (or in another ministry team) what their story is.



*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.**



## Session 3:

# Going beyond: The stories of others



### Preparation

- *Remind the appointed member(s) before the session that they will be sharing their story.*
  - *Ensure your technology is set up and "Session 3: Going beyond: the stories of others" is ready to play.*
- 



### Group check-in (5-10 min)

- *Would anyone like to share their experience of getting to know someone else's story outside of this group?*
- 



### Setting the scene (2 min)

*Last session we learnt the skill of getting to grips with our own story, and got to engage with some of the stories in our group. We learnt more about some of the Ask. Listen. Tell. principles and about how our stories connect to God's bigger story.*

*This session we'll focus on how to use story-sharing as a way to reach out to others, to go beyond our comfort zones and our assumptions of people. We'll especially be challenged to take the courageous step of getting to know those who are different from us or who we feel shy about getting to know better.*

*First, we'll watch the trailer and a few scenes from Beyond the River, a film produced by Heartlines, and then have some discussions based on what we've watched. The main characters, Duma and Steve, show how we work alongside people every day but know so little of one another's stories.*





## Film synopsis



*Duma is a talented young man who feels trapped by his surroundings and finds himself on the wrong side of the law. After a near miss with the cops, he finds an escape in the world of canoeing, an old passion of his. Steve is a nine-time Dusi gold medallist whose marriage is on the verge of collapse. His passion for the sport is fuelled by his desire to escape from something in his past that continues to haunt him.*

*Through a series of unexpected events, the two men find themselves attempting the three-day Dusi Canoe Marathon as a doubles pair. But there are a few things they must overcome, not least of which is the completely different worlds they come from. They realise that the dream they both desperately want requires them to work together, both in the boat and Beyond the River. The film is inspired by the true story of Siseko Ntondini and Piers Cruickshanks, who defied many odds to compete in the 2014 Dusi.*



### **Watch video** (20 min)

As a group, you can now watch the video, **Session 3: Going beyond: the stories of others.**

(Note: This session cannot be run without the video. The video, including trailer and BTR film clips, can be found in the back of this resource or online at [www.church.wysza.org](http://www.church.wysza.org))

**Press play:** Session 3: Going beyond - the story of others

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### **Show Beyond the River trailer and Clip 1: Getting to the dam on time**

(Discuss in pairs)

1. How much do you know about where some of your small-group members live, and how they get to church?

### **Show Clip 2: Language barriers**

(Discuss in pairs)

2. In what ways does language create problems in getting to know someone?

3. What are some creative ways we could use to break down language barriers?

### **Show video Clip 3: Do you know my story?**

(Discuss as a group)

4. What are some of the things that prevent us from getting to know our fellow Christians better? What prevents us from reaching out beyond “our people”?

5. What practical things could we do to live more relationally and communally, in this small group and as a church?



Ask someone to record or write down the ideas for your group to do.



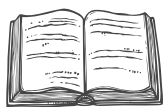


### **Tell: Sharing stories** (10-20 min)

*The group member(s) selected in the previous session shares their story. If you have enough time, two members can share but make sure the time is equally distributed.*

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

- Say an encouraging word or identify something that inspired you from their story.
- 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.
- Write an encouraging word or blessing for them to take home.
- If time permits, you can offer the opportunity to ask the person questions.



### **Read: Galatians 3:28** (10 min)

Read the scripture together and discuss the questions.

1. What would it mean for us to really live out this scripture of being "one in Christ"? Which values do we need in order to do so? What should we be doing that we are not doing right now?
2. In what ways can we use story-sharing as a means to love our neighbours?



*Ask someone to record or write down the ideas for your group to do.*



### **Go beyond**

In God's Kingdom, His desire is for every nation, tribe, people and tongue to be doing life together. As Christians we have an opportunity to make sure people in our church – and those beyond our church – feel invited to be part of a loving community, regardless of their age, language or background.

In the week ahead, we encourage everyone to get to know the story of someone outside our congregation, especially someone we consider different to ourselves. There are some guiding questions in the back of your Participant's Workbook for starting that conversation. Get to know their story and encourage them to become part of our story of a loving community.

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### **Close in prayer.**



## Session 4: Creating a culture of community



### Preparation

- *Remind the appointed member(s) before the session that they will be sharing their story.*
  - *Ensure your technology is set up and "Session 4: Creating a culture of community" is ready to play*
- 



### Group check-in (5-10 min)

- *In which ways have the past few sessions affected what you believe about Christian community? How has listening to the stories of others impacted you?*
- 



### Watch video (5 min)

*As a group, you can now watch the video, **Session 4: Creating a culture of community.***

*(Note: The video can be found in the back of this resource or online at [www.church.wysza.org](http://www.church.wysza.org). If you can't show the video, read the script-version of the video out loud to the group.)*

**Press play:** Session 4: Creating a culture of community  
Or

**Read:** Script-version: Creating a culture of community



## Script-version: Creating a culture of community

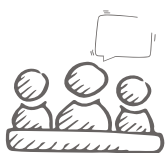
Taking the courageous step of getting to know another person's story is good. Making a habit of sharing in people's stories and, in so doing, creating a culture of relational community, is better!

We've made it to the last session of our journey. Over the past three sessions we've learnt about how to create safe spaces for story-sharing, how to *Ask. Listen. Tell*, how to get to grips with our own stories, and how to get to know the stories of people beyond our church. We've heard some of the stories shared by brave members in our group, and we ourselves have taken the courageous step of getting to know people beyond our group.

All around South Africa, and beyond our borders, thousands of people have encountered and been transformed by *What's Your Story?* We've heard stories about how this tool is impacting individuals, families, churches, youth groups and even entire communities.

In our last session we'll try to answer the question, "Where to from here?" We'll also consider ways in which we can use this tool to create a culture of story-sharing so that everywhere we are, we make an effort to build intentional relationships.

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### Group discussion (20 min)

1. In what practical ways can we create a culture of community through story-sharing in our families, small group, and broader congregation (think about things like weekly meetings, new members, etc)?
2. What's one commitment you'd like to make in your own life when it comes to story-sharing? Which value(s) would help you live this out?

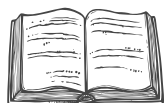


### **Tell: Member shares story (10-20 min)**

The remaining group member(s) shares their story. If you haven't been able to cover everyone's story, consider how you can incorporate their stories as part of your next meetings.

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

- Say an encouraging word or identify something that inspired you from their story.
- 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.
- Write an encouraging word or blessing for them to take home.
- If time permits, you can offer the opportunity to ask the person questions.



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### **Read: Mark 12:29-31 (5 min)**

*Read the scripture together.*

We've taken the first step in showing love to our "neighbours" in this group, and beyond, through taking an interest in their lives and their stories. We've accepted the challenge to build the kind of church and small groups that make people feel welcomed, accepted, heard and connected. It's really not that hard or complicated – it starts with one simple question:

***"What's Your Story?"***

*Now let's go to our families, our church, schools, workplaces and to the ends of the earth and build communities of love the way Jesus intended.*



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**Close in prayer.**



WYS?





# Methods of sharing your story

1. The River of Life
2. Tree of Life (Roots & Fruits)
3. Photographs & objects
4. Prompts
5. Fork in the road
6. Story-sharing through questions

## 1. The River of Life

Required materials: Paper (A4 or larger).  
Coloured pens, crayons or khokis.



### How it works:

1. Imagine your life as a river which roughly corresponds to the chronological order of events in your real life. For example, the river can be calm and straight, perhaps bubbling, during the good/happy times. The river might then wind itself around large, imposing rocks that could represent obstacles you've faced. Think of relationships or key moments with your family and friends, or encounters with people who are different to you. A major bend in the river could represent a big life change, such as moving away from home. A waterfall could represent those times when you feel like you lost control and were caught in a downward spiral.
2. Think also of your river in terms of some key moments in South Africa's history, and in terms of significant personal encounters.
3. Spend some time drawing your river.
4. Once you've done this, choose four key moments – good and bad – that have shaped who you are today. These are what you'll share when telling your story.
5. Note: This method is suitable for any age group or context, provided you are able to allocate some time for the drawing of the river.

## 2. Tree of Life (Roots & Fruits)

Required materials: Paper (A4 or larger). Coloured pens, crayons or khokis.



### **How it works:**

1. Think of your life as a tree
2. Spend some time drawing your tree.

### *Roots of my life*

- Who are the people that played the biggest role in my life while I was growing up?
- What are the moments, events or memories that I believe have shaped who I am today?
- What are the key moments or memories I have from my upbringing when it comes to relating to others?

### *Fruits of my life*

- What are the key moments, victories or accomplishments I hold dearest in my life right now or over the past few years?
- What are some good fruits or personal victories when it comes to relating to others?

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## 3. Photographs and objects

Required materials: a photograph for each decade of your life. Alternatively, you can bring in a few objects (between 4-6) that have special meaning to you. It could be an item of clothing, a book or DVD, a certificate, a tool or gadget, etc.



### **How it works:**

1. The person tells the story of the day the photograph was taken and what was happening when it was taken. Listeners are encouraged to ask questions about the story.
2. If using objects, explain what story each item tells about a specific part of your life, or how it has been instrumental in defining who you are.

## 4. Prompts

### How it works:

1. Using a sentence or phrase to prompt ideas is commonly used by writers and people who journal.
2. Choose a single sentence that be given to the group to interpret and use as a starting point to respond. For example: "It was the greatest risk I ever took..." This sentence can teach the group more about what someone is afraid of and what they are willing to risk their lives for, what they value, and what they have been through.



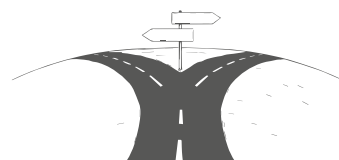
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## 5. Fork in the Road

### How it works:

Choose a big moment in your life and imagine it as a fork in the road. Use this as the centre for your story. Some helpful questions to build your story could be:

- What was a fork in the road in your life? What was a key defining moment or a turning point issue or decision you were facing?
- What series of events were happening before this fork in the road, that may have led up to this point?
- What else was happening in your life at the time you needed to make that decision?
- What were some of the factors that influenced your decision: personal beliefs, advice from others, books you read, etc?
- How did that fork in the road story shape who you are today?



## 6. Story-sharing through questions

You can tell your own story using the questions below. You can also use these to ask someone else their story.



1. Where was I born and raised? What kind of family did I grow up in – big or small, rich or poor, urban or rural?
2. Which were my most important relationships growing up? Who are some of the people who played the biggest role in my life?
3. What are some of the big events or turning points in my life that have helped define who I am?
4. What were some of my challenges growing up? What were some of the choices I made to overcome those challenges?
5. What are the anchoring beliefs or values by which I live my life?
6. Can I think of an encounter with a person who is different to me (culture, race, religion, class, etc.) – both negative and positive? How have those events shaped my story?
7. What are some significant achievements, events or experiences that shaped my life?
8. What are some of my own future goals, as well as my hopes for my family's wellbeing, and the wellbeing of my community and country?

## Where to from here?

Thank you for joining us on this journey of building intentional Christian community through sharing in one another's stories. If you'd like to continue this journey in other spaces in your church or life, we have a number of *What's Your Story?* resources available.

Some are previously-published resources, some are stand-alone modules, and others are new mini resources that can be incorporated into different contexts.



### ***What's Your Story? for your Church***

A resource that outlines *What's Your Story?* and suggests practical ways to roll it out in your church or Christian organisation. Includes examples of how other churches have used *What's Your Story?*



### ***What's Your Story? for Christian Small Groups***

A four-session, video-based resource for building community within and beyond a small group. Includes training videos, a session on *Beyond the River*, story-sharing ideas, and how to *Ask. Listen. Tell.*



### ***What's Your Story? Participant's Workbook***

The corresponding workbook for participants going through *What's Your Story? for Christian Small Groups*. Includes ideas for how to get to grips with your own story.



### ***Beyond the River for Youth Groups***

A three-session resource on story-sharing for youth groups. Includes a session on *Beyond the River*, as well as ideas for story-sharing events and activities for youth groups.



### ***Beyond the River for Church Youth Groups***

A three-session DVD resource for your youth group or small group. Includes film clips of scenes for discussion from *Beyond the River*.



### ***What's Your Story? for Reconciliation***

A five-session DVD resource on using story-sharing as a way to build bridges across racial, ethnic and other divides. (Also known as the WYS Church Toolkit).



### **WYS Sermon Outlines**

A series of sermon outlines to launch *What's your Story?* to your congregation. Includes sermons on:

- The biblical imperative for story-sharing
  - How to create spaces
- Using *What's Your Story?* for reconciliation.



### **Ask. Listen. Tell.**

A mini resource on our process for creating safe spaces for story-sharing. Includes guidelines on how to ask someone their story, how to listen well, and how to tell your own story.



### **Creating a Culture of Story-sharing**

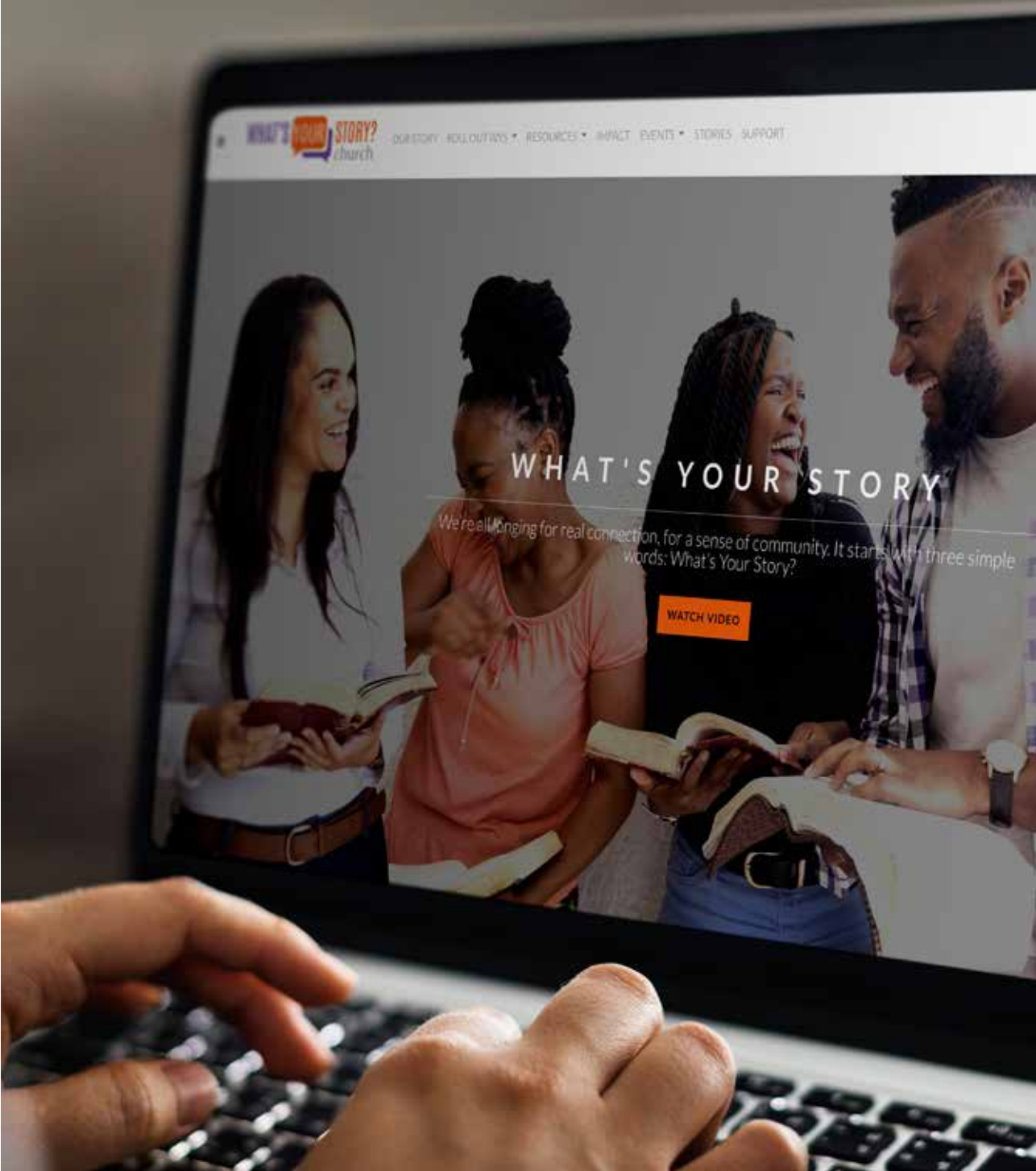
A mini resource with ideas for how to use *What's Your Story?* to create a culture of story-sharing in your church.



### **What's Your Story? for Schools**

We have an online resource centre to help you apply *What's Your Story?* in your school. To find out more, email us at [wys@heartlines.org.za](mailto:wys@heartlines.org.za)





Find all videos & WYS resources at  
our online resource centre:

[www.church.wysza.org](http://www.church.wysza.org)

## Share your group's story with us



We'd love to hear about your small group's experience of using this resource. Send us your feedback, photos, videos or testimonials.

**Email:** wys@heartlines.org.za

**FB:** whatsyourstoryza

**Twitter:** @HeartlinesZA #whatsyourstoryza

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**The Heartlines What's Your Story? team would like to thank:**

- WYS Church Mobilisation Team
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- The focus groups who tested this resource
- Everyone who offered feedback on this resource
- Indie Village Creative team

### Additional credits

- Tree of Life storytelling method - Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough
- Fork in the Road, River of Life and Prompts storytelling - adapted from various sites online
- A time you weren't listened to exercise (p. 26)

<https://www.trainingzone.co.uk/develop/cpd/trainers-tips-active-listening-exercises>



Find all videos at our online resource centre:

[www.church.wysza.org](http://www.church.wysza.org)



# WHAT'S STORY?

An initiative of

**HEARTLINES**

**The Centre for Values Promotion**



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