We believe that the Scriptures are God's story of redemption and that followers of Jesus are active participants in writing this story. We have been changed to bring change. In short, we are telling stories with our lives. But what kind of stories are we telling with our lives? Have we even considered looking at our lives as stories? Do our lives have anything to say to the world about how God is making all things new? The answer is a resounding yes.

We believe that God wants to redeem every part of us and that our fears, failures, and brokenness can be restored and made whole. We value the inner journey of returning to our story and allowing God to reshape, retell, and redeem it. Telling our lives as stories to one another in community is one of the most powerful ways of learning about God and one another. What follows are some simple thoughts to help you think about telling your life as a story and what it might look like to do so with one another.

Telling Your Story

~I'm not telling that person…

There is a sense in which telling people about yourself and your experiences can be frightening. After all, if you do not know these people well, how will they respond? Will they use your story against you to judge you or think differently of you? It is because of this that telling your story should happen in a very particular kind of way.

~The story is your life

Your story is not confined to how you came to believe in Christ. Your story is all encompassing but not necessarily highly detailed. Telling your story to a group of people should leave them feeling like they have a general sense of who you are or from where you've come. Again, telling your story need not be full disclosure of your deepest darkest secret to people you do not know well. The goal is not information and fact finding but giving those around you a glimpse of the essence and spirit of who you are.

~What do I tell?

Some helpful things to think about when telling your story are:

- **Family of origin**: What was your family like? What do you most remember about growing up? What were relationships with your family members like? As you think about your family tree, what things come to mind, both good and bad?
- **Key relationships**: What people have had a major role in your development as a person or follower of Jesus?
- **Key moments of growth**: What positive experiences have helped you develop into the person that you are today?
- **Key moments of brokenness**: What painful experiences have shaped you? How did these things change your life?
- **What makes you come alive**: What are the things in your life that fill you with excitement or purpose? What brings joy to your bones? What do you have to do because if you don't do it you'll be miserable?

Responding to someone's story

~Creating Space

The purpose of responding to someone's story is to create a space in which that person can hear themselves, and perhaps if we are present, we will hear along with them. The point of this space is not to fix and troubleshoot but to ***hear*** and to ***be*** together.

~Questions

As you listen with someone who is telling their story, questions will play a central role in responding. However, these questions must be open and honest.

> "What are the marks of an honest, open question? An honest question is one I can ask without possibly being able to say to myself, "I know the right answer to this question, and I sure hope you give it to me." A dishonest question insults your soul, partly because of my arrogance in assuming that I know what you need and partly because of my fraudulence in trying to disguise my counsel as a query. An open question is one that expands rather than restricts your arena of exploration, one that does not push or even nudge you toward a particular way of framing a situation. "How do you feel about the experience you just described?" is an open question. "Why do you seem so sad?" is not." **Parker Palmer**

- Questions should be short and to the point, confined to a single sentence if possible. No questions should include a preamble or need clarification before presented. A brief question, with no preamble or explanation, reduces the risk that I will start to offer covert advice.
- The questions should be gently paced with periods of silence between a question, a response, and the next question.
- Questions should not be asked to satisfy my own curiosity. Instead, my questions should come from a desire to support the storyteller's inner journey. **[All bullet points taken from Parker Palmer's A Hidden Wholeness]**

~Affirmation

There should be space left before a prayer of blessing for listeners to affirm the storyteller. Affirmation could name the giftedness that the storyteller exhibits in his or her life: "You have a deep love for others." Or "Your ability to navigate conflict is something we need to learn from." This time can and should also be used to affirm the painful experiences in a person's journey.

~Blessing

This time of storytelling and response should have a very honoring sense of closure. If the storyteller is comfortable, the group should gather round that person and lay hands on them and say a prayer of blessing upon the storyteller thanking God for what He has done and will continue to do in this person's life.

***written by Brad Nelson 2006**