

*Fresh Expression*

ESSENTIALS FOR PRACTITIONERS

# HOW TO TELL A JESUS STORY





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*Even before the Gospels were written down, the early Christians gathered in homes and public spaces to tell stories about Jesus and his teachings.*

*In Fresh Expressions and other innovative forms of Christian community focused on people who aren't already part of the church, the simple practice of sharing Jesus stories brings this tradition alive today.*





# INTRODUCTION

“Jesus Stories” are simple, short retellings about something Jesus said or did in five minutes or less. They can be told by any disciple (not just clergy). Jesus stories are accompanied by open-ended questions that spark discussion. Gathering around Jesus stories provides opportunities for open and honest conversations about the joys and struggles in our lives that people from any or no religious background can enter into.

Here are some simple instructions for how to tell a Jesus story. As with anything in Fresh Expressions or mission, don't go alone! At least two people should partner together to lead these kinds of conversations (Lk 10: 1). They happen best in neighborhood spaces or homes where people are comfortable gathering and have already begun to form relationships characterized by listening, loving, and building community.

LET'S DO IT!





# 01 CRAFTING THE JESUS STORY

## **Step 1: Prayerfully choose a Jesus story.**

Prayerfully search the scriptures and ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you as you read. What is something Jesus said or did that resonates with you? Read the passage multiple times, consult commentaries to see what others have said about this passage.

## **Step 2: Locate yourself in the Jesus story.**

Prayerfully ask yourself why this Jesus story is so meaningful to you. Why does this story touch your soul? Where do you see yourself in what Jesus said or did? How has this changed you? If the story or teaching doesn't move you personally, you should find another one that does.

## **Step 3: Prepare the Jesus story.**

How will you share this Jesus story with others? If it helps you to write it down, feel free to do so. However, it's better if you can tell the story without notes. Perhaps read the passage aloud, then rehearse how you will communicate to the group.

## **Step 4: Deliver the Jesus story in 3-5 minutes.**

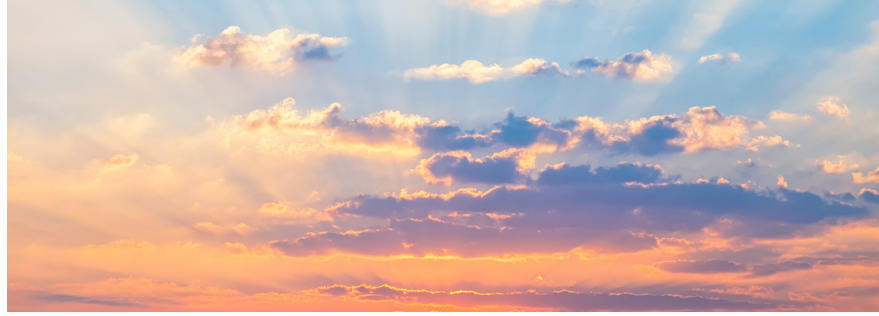
Tell the Jesus story to your community. It doesn't need to be long. 3-5 minutes is a good rule. You could simply read a couple verses of the story out loud, then summarize. Try thinking of the narrative form you are using like the one offered below in section II.

## **Step 5: Ask questions to spark the conversation.**

Here are some questions you might consider: What would this story look like today? What if this Jesus story is true? If it is true, how would it make a difference in my life? What is this Jesus story saying to me? What is one small thing I can change in my daily life as a result of this Jesus story? What is one thing I might do differently?

**These questions give access for non-Christians to join in the conversation. They are intentionally designed not to be “right or wrong” answer questions, but to invite curiosity and reflection.**

# DELIVERING THE JESUS STORY



Telling a story is an art form that you can improve upon with practice. Remember the four movements of a good Jesus story:

- 1. Set the tension:** invite your hearers on a narrative journey with something provocative or curious that upsets the equilibrium (ex. “Jesus ate good food with bad people” “Have you ever felt unclean?” “Jesus was guilty of shepherd malpractice; he left 99 in the wilderness to pursue a lost wild one” “Here’s a story Jesus told about a reckless sower, he cast good seed wastefully all over the place,” etc.).
- 2. Paint the picture:** tell the group exactly what the story says. Look for details in the text that color the story for your hearers.
- 3. Personal experience:** why is this Jesus story meaningful to you personally, how has it healed, challenged, or changed you? Give personal testimony about Jesus in your own life.
- 4. Resolve the tension:** close with answering the question you asked or restoring equilibrium to the quandary you raised. Better yet, invite your hearers to resolve the tension by using the kinds of questions suggested above!



That’s it—it’s that simple! Each time you gather, invite someone else to share the Jesus story.

1. Set the Tension
2. Paint the Picture
3. Personal Experience
4. Resolve the Tension

Give them these guidelines to help them along.



# FACILITATING THE CONVERSATION

As we share Jesus stories, people who are not quite comfortable getting “preached at” on Sunday mornings find space to ask questions and join the discussion.

People respond with personal insights, questions, and challenges.

The “proclaimer” shifts into the role of “facilitator.”

The engagement draws from the collective wisdom of the group.

It is modeled after Jesus, the master teacher, who asked more questions than he gave answers. Jesus told lots of stories and parables that invited deeper questions and reflection.

Here's some keys to facilitating the conversation:

1. Dont Dominate
2. Honor each Contribution
3. Spread the Love
4. Do no Harm



**1. Don't dominate:** Once you have delivered the story, your role now shifts into that of facilitator. Now you are mining for the questions and insights of others in the group. The genius is not in the room, the genius is the room.

**2. Honor each contribution:** There are no right or wrong answers; each person's contribution must be valued and celebrated. Give each person the benefit of the doubt. Sometimes hecklers show up, some come to scoff, but they often stay to pray. If people issue challenging or undermining comments, honor their contribution but then reframe it, "that's an interesting way to think about that, here's how Christians have interpreted that..." "this is a complicated topic, people have a variety of ways they understand this, here's my thoughts... who else has a perspective on this..." "it sounds like this is something you are really wrestling with; can we stay after the group so we can talk it out together?" The key is not to shut down or exclude, but also protect others in the circle.

**3. Spread the love:** Some folks can get really excited and want to make lots of contributions, let them, but try not to let one or two people dominate the entire time. You can do this with simply saying, "I can see you are really passionate about this, who else wants to jump in?" "let's hear from someone who hasn't shared yet" "before you double or triple dip, let's give everyone a chance to share." You could also set a boundary up front, "let's all limit our sharing to 3-5 minutes and make sure each person has an opportunity to share before we double dip!"

**4. Do no harm:** As facilitators we do have a responsibility to minimize people potentially being harmed. If someone is being particularly rude or disruptive, you may need to turn the group over to another teammate and have a side conversation. Sometimes you will need to be direct, "thanks for sharing your perspective, do you realize how that might be harmful to others here?" "that's not really the focus of this Jesus story, can we talk about that offline?" "I can feel that this is a big issue for you, can you stay after with me so I can get a better understanding?" In extreme cases you might have to call in outside support or law enforcement—though that would be exceptionally unusual. The key principle is to protect the members of the group.

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Alan Hirsch, Rich Robinson, and colleagues of the Movement Leaders Collective for this insight.





# CONCLUSION: WHY JESUS STORIES?

Here are some key advantages to proclamation in this form:

- Anyone can lead these Bible discussions. It's an "every member" ministry (1 Pet. 2:9).
- Enquirers can easily join in, even if they are agnostic, atheist, or "spiritual but not religious" (Acts 8:26-40).
- Scripture does the evangelism and disciple making, as the Holy Spirit works on each person's heart at his or her own pace (Rom. 10:17).
- Christians share their faith almost without knowing it. You don't have to be a long-term disciple or seminary trained to tell a story and ask some questions (Matt. 25:37-38).
- Seekers see how the Bible and the Christian community impact life (Jn. 8:30).
- Leadership is shared with newcomers, increasing their commitment to the group (Jn. 4:29).
- New Christians learn how to study the Bible, apply it to their lives, share it with their friends, and find helpful resources (Jn. 4:39-42).
- If the leader moves on, the group has the means to keep going. Sustainability is built in (1 Thess. 2:17).

This helps empower laity and expand congregations to become a constellation of little communities spread across an entire area. These gatherings are distributed across a seven day work week, meeting at different times and places, making church more accessible to those not currently connected with any congregation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> My thanks to Dwight Zscheile and friends at Faith + Lead for helpful insight in developing this practice.

