

Session three

Their story

Aim

By the end of this session group members should be able to:

- Consider ways to improve their abilities as listeners to others.
- Understand the link between hearing others tell their story and connecting it to God's story.



Before the session...

Read: Story Bearer - Chapter 8

Recap

Offer an opportunity to anyone who wants to show off their homework, having practised their story, to share what they have done with the rest of the group.

Welcome

Take the listening quiz on pages 75-76 of Story Bearer as a group. Take each question one by one and discuss each one, but don't take it overly seriously. It is meant as a light-hearted opportunity to self-reflect on our listening skills and is an opportunity to laugh at ourselves. Here is the quiz in full for reference:

1. How often when someone is talking to you do you:

- a. Interrupt?
- b. Think about what you are doing later?
- c. Allow your eyes to glaze over?
- d. Update your social media status?
- e. Wish you had more interesting friends/colleagues?
- f. Nod off?

2. In conversation do you ever find yourself just waiting for the next opportunity to speak?

3. If someone says something you don't quite understand do you:

- a. Stop them immediately and ask them to explain it?
- b. Wait for them to finish what they are saying and ask for clarity?
- c. Not tell them you didn't understand – it probably wasn't important – you got the gist?
- d. Not tell them you didn't understand - you were thinking of something else anyway?

4. Where is your phone when you meet up with someone?

- a. Turned off and in your pocket – I am not going to be distracted.
- b. In your pocket but on vibrate – I should at least know how popular I am by the buzzing against my leg.
- c. On the table – I need to be aware of important notifications and ready to respond if something is urgent.

d. On the table and ready for action – the person sat opposite me is just one person in my world. There's a whole virtual network to interact with at the same time.

5. When you sit down with a friend in a coffee shop do you like to look outwards so you can people watch as they talk?

6. Are your questions:

- a. Open? e.g. Tell me about your day/what keeps you busy/about your hobbies?
- b. Closed? e.g. Are you ok?
- c. Imaginative and interested?
- d. Only asked because you want to give your answer to that question?

In this session we explore the need to be a good listener in evangelism, to hear people's stories, ask good questions and find the connection points between their story and God's story. Being a good friend is about really understanding someone, hearing their worldview and the experiences that have shaped them and being genuinely interested in who they are.



Read...

The Bible - John 4: 1-29

Discuss

- What are the things that make a good listener? Who are the people in your life who are good listeners? What are their characteristics that demonstrate this?
- In John 4, Jesus has this remarkable encounter with the woman. What are the key things that he does that create the connection and leads her to an understanding of who he is?
- What are the big lessons for us from the story for how we share our faith with our friends?

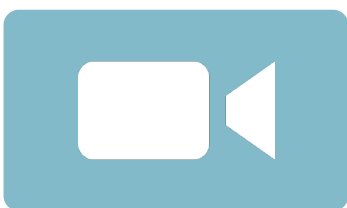
- Consider the stories Phil tells in Story Bearer, pages 80-84, those of Dani, Ads, Tom and Clare, and the connections points between their lives and God’s story. First of all consider your own story. What would be the connection points between your story and God’s?
- Secondly, think about your friends who don’t know Jesus yet. Where would be the comparable connections between their lives and God’s story?

Activity

This is an opportunity to think about our friendships. Ask each group member to take a piece of paper and put their name in the centre. Draw a circle round your name and then draw a number of concentric circles around the central circle so that there are 4-5 layers and the sheet looks a bit like a target. Encourage the group to think about the friendships they have and how deep those friendships are.

Begin to populate the paper with the names of these people , the closer you feel a friendship is, the closer they are to the centre. Encourage the group to prayerfully consider where God is asking them to deepen their relationships with friends on their paper and mark these names with an arrow pointing inwards to the centre of the circles. The group may also like to ask God where the connection points are with individuals who do not know Him yet and these could be added to the paper.

At the end of the activity, invite group members to share if they want to.



Watch...

Coldplay – Everglow - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXyZHYsVkol> (There is a bit of swearing at 1:12 you may want to mute at this point)

Phil writes about this video later in Story Bearer – pages 126-128 – and uses it as an example of how God uses us in the world to make a difference in the lives of our friends. The encouragement is that God is always at work in our friends lives before we even get there, our job is to observe where he is at work and join in. Listening, sharing our story and the relevant bits of God’s story are a great way of doing this.

Response

Using the Coldplay video as a prompt, encourage the group to think about what their sign would be to God to join in with what he is doing in the world, and especially the lives of our friends. On a new piece of paper, or even better, on the other side of the one used for the names activity, encourage group members to write down where they feel God is calling them to be active with him and commit to something new – this could be . Here are some potential examples:

I commit to being a Story Bearer – to knowing my story and trying to take opportunities to telling it at work.

I will pray for these three friends and invite them to church at Christmas.

I will keep serving at the food bank and praying for the people who come along.

When I go out with my friend for coffee I will make sure I ask more questions than talk about myself, and try to ask deeper questions that scratch below the surface of superficial chat.

Again, people can choose whether they share these or not with the rest of the group and if feeling particularly expressive, can hold them above their heads like the boy at the Coldplay concert!

Pray

Close the session with a time of prayer for each group member that they would be able to do what they have felt challenged to with God's help.