
Currents FOCUS

Telling Your God Story

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Our lives are filled with stories. Stories tap into our humanity. They feed our imagination, build our intellect, expand our world views, and make us feel seen. Stories build community.

As Christians, scripture tells us that we are to be storytellers. Not fictional storytellers, but storytellers of the Truth — the Good News — the Gospel of Christ. At the end of both Matthew and Mark, Jesus tells his disciples to go into the world and preach the gospel (Matt 28:19 & Mark 16:7). In Acts, Jesus' followers were touched by the Holy Spirit and sent out to be witnesses to the ends of the earth (1:8), and in Romans, Paul tells the church that “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (10:17). As Christians, we have been sent out to the world to share the gospel, gifted by the Holy Spirit, and told that people receive faith through *hearing* the word of Christ. In our baptismal covenant we made a public profession “to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ through *word* and deed.”¹ There is no better way to fulfill this commitment than to share our personal testimony — our God Story.

Craig Nesson, in his book, *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation* tells us that the church is at a crossroads. We need to either learn how to evangelize — to proclaim the Good News to the world — or other traditions will take our place in the contemporary religious landscape (121). Often, in our culture when we hear the word “evangelize” we think “proselytize.” But, to evangelize simply means sharing your God Story: Where have you seen God in your life? Why are you a Christian? What does the Good News of the Gospel mean to you? We don't have to “save souls,” but rather just tell our story and open the door for the Holy Spirit to enter and do her work.

So how do we tell our God story? A couple of years ago, on a long, summer road trip, I listened to a plethora of podcasts and audiobooks. That experience made me realize that when I hear a good story, I'm drawn in and often left with a sense of curiosity, wanting to know more. The stories don't tell me what to think or believe, but they expand my world. One of my favorite podcasts

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is *The Moth Radio Hour (The Moth)*, produced by Jay Allison at Atlantic Public Media. On *The Moth* storytellers tell true, short stories about an event or person that has impacted their life in some way. They are given a prompt and tutored, then put on stage without notes or manuscript, with a maximum of five minutes to share their story. The stories that are told on this podcast pull me in every single time! I began to wonder if I could adapt *The Moth* storytelling formula to teach people how to tell their personal testimonies — their God Stories. While researching how to tell a *Moth* style story, the producers published a book titled, *How to Tell a Story*. The book lays out their method which I have used as a foundation to begin to build a curriculum. The outline below is my adaptation of insights from *How to Tell a Story* to “Telling Your God Story.”

Storytelling

Before you begin working on your God Story, it will be helpful to keep the following points in front of you while building it out:

1. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 237.

It must be true.

This is your personal story about your relationship with God. God is active and present in every moment of our lives. We do not need to fabricate a story to make God's actions in our life feel miraculous. What God does, even in the mundane moments is enough. We just need to believe this and tell our story with authenticity and conviction.

It must have stakes.

A story needs action, and the action must have consequences. If we believe that God is working in our lives and we look closely, we will find events or people that God has used to make an impact on our life. Listeners will pay attention to a story if they feel like they are in it with you.

It must be your story to tell.

You are one of the main characters. It is easy for us to tell someone else's story, because we have no skin in the game — nothing to lose. You have a stake in your own story, and your vulnerability and authenticity are what makes the story impactful for the listener. "Neuroscientists have proven that people who hear relatable stories are more motivated and inspired to take action than if they just heard facts."²

It must be no longer than five minutes.

Learn to tell it without notes or prompts. This is your go-to testimony, you want to be able to tell it on the fly, and you don't want to lose the listener in unnecessary details. Your succinct, enticing, true story will pull the listener in and leave them with a sense of curiosity and wanting to know more.

"Know your story well enough so you can have fun!"

Watching you panic to think of the next memorized line is harrowing for the audience. Make an outline, memorize your bullet points and play with the details."³

Developing your Story: What is your God Story?

1. Think back through moments of your life.

Recall events, large or small that changed you. Make a list — write everything down. Don't immediately dismiss small moments because they don't seem to hold much of a story. Add them to the list and ponder them. Ask yourself why that moment came to mind and where you find God in it. We all have stressful or embarrassing events in our lives. If you choose to share one, know that your vulnerability will likely touch someone deeply. If you tell

2. "The Power of Story," *National Geographic*, Storytellers Collective, accessed June 1, 2025, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/society/storytellers-collective/storytelling-workshops/>

3. "The Moth | Storytelling Tips & Tricks," The Moth (en-US), accessed May 14, 2025, <https://themoth.org/share-your-story/storytelling-tips-tricks>.

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about a hard time, don't "let a trauma or struggle be the story, but rather the context of the story."⁴ You don't need to tell about the whole traumatic event. Dig deep and find the smaller, personal story within the trauma that impacted you. Building your story on one personal instance will help the listener relate to your message.

After you have made your list, read through it again and choose one story to tell. The one that is easiest to tell might not be the best. Trust your instincts. Looking at your list, you should know which event has the best God Story for this moment in your life. If you're not sure, narrow the list down to no more than three events. Hopefully, the extra stories will naturally be eliminated as you move through the process.

2. What was the enticing incident that set everything in motion?

Once you have chosen the story you want to tell, ask yourself, "What was the enticing moment in this story?" It is difficult to see the turning point of an event in the moment it is happening, but things get much clearer with hindsight. This is especially true when we are looking for where God was in that story. Make note of the incident that set everything in motion.

3. What are the stakes of your story?

"Stakes show us why you care, which tells us why we should care."⁵ What did you feel that you had to lose or gain in this story? How did the event of this story change you? Don't use antidotes but dig deep to understand why this story had a lasting effect on you. Why is it important to you? "When in doubt, don't describe facts; show how those facts come to life for you."⁶ If it helps, boil the

4. Meg Bowles et al., *How to Tell a Story* (New York: Crown, 2023), 49.

5. Bowles et al., *How to Tell a Story*, 70.

6. Lisa Christen, "Leaders: Seven Tips for Becoming a Better Storyteller," *Forbes*, Sept 30, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/councils/>

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story down to one sentence. That may give you clarity and help shape the story you want to tell.

4. *Identify important information needed to build your story.*

Now that you've thought through the purpose of your story and why it is important, it is time to start pulling it together. Begin by creating a bullet list of the narrative steps in the story. This may feel a bit tedious, but it will help keep your story on track, weed out unnecessary details (remember you only five minutes in which to tell it), and ensure you don't miss any important details. You should have only one pivotal scene that your story is built towards. There are always side stories to tell, but it is important to focus only on this one story. You can use a backstory only if it is important for the listener to understand your context.

Once you have gathered the details, determine the opening and closing of the story. Remember what the main point is that you want the listener to walk away with. Knowing where you'll begin and end will help you stay on course as you build out your God Story.

5. *Draw listeners into your story.*

Stay in the story and describe the scene as you experienced it. Use details and your senses to make the story uniquely yours and draw people in.

- **How did you feel?** Was it hot or cold? Were you in a crowd that made you feel smothered? Were you alone and sad? Were you exhausted from a red-eye flight?
- **What did you see?** Were you outside in the sunshine or was there a rainbow in the sky? Were you in a dressing room full of mirrors and bright lights? Were you in the airport where people were running to catch their flight? What did the scene of the event look like?
- **What did you taste?** Were you eating? Did you take medicine that left a bad taste in your mouth? Did you have flavored chapstick on that you could taste when you licked your lips? Was your mouth dry from dehydration?
- **What did you smell?** Was there smoke in the air? Was there a scent of freshly mown grass or a spring rainfall? Were you baking cookies that left a warm inviting scent in the kitchen?

Using your senses in telling your story sets the scene and makes it come alive for the listener. Build tension in your story, but don't go overboard—remember what God has done is enough. We don't need to exaggerate the story, but using emotions will draw people in. "Emotions connect you to your listener and allow them to experience your story and feel what you are feeling."⁷ Emotions are what tie humanity together, even among strangers. And remember that laughter can relieve tension or suspense. You can talk about

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a funny moment, but this isn't a time to tell jokes.

6. *Are you ready to tell this story?*

If your story is still too close to the original event or if the point of your story is a result of trauma that causes you pain, you may not be ready to share this story. It doesn't mean that you need to scrap the story, but maybe just put it aside for a while. You want to make sure that the impact for the listener is from the story itself and not the pain that it is still causing you. Stories from trauma should be told from a place of healing. "It is not a show of bravery to tell a story before you're ready."⁸

Endings

Well, you've done a lot of work to build your God Story and you're nearly ready to tell it. As you bring your story to conclusion, make sure you use the following points to end strong. You don't want to tell a great story and lose your listener with a weak ending. You want to land your ending!

- Do not leave the listener wondering what happened.
- Do not end with a moral or tell the listener what to think.
- Come to a definite stop without meandering.
- Make sure the ending is rooted in the change you experienced.
- Answer the central question or conflict of the story.⁹

Always end in a place that is satisfying for the listener and unique to your overall experience.

Sharing Your God Story

Now that you have a great testimony to tell, it's time to share your story. Make an outline, memorize your bullet points and get ready to have fun with the details. If you have done this work with friends, or a small group, or the whole congregation, practice telling your God Stories with each other. Your delivery will get better the more you practice. Make a party out of telling your God Story!

forbescoachescouncil.com/2020/09/30/leaders-seven-tips-for-becoming-a-better-storyteller/

7. Bowles et al., *How to Tell a Story*, 144.

8. Bowles et al., *How to Tell a Story*, 144.

9. Bowles et al., *How to Tell a Story*, 190.

Being able to share how God has worked in your life is worth a celebration. Following *The Moth* formula, consider holding a story slam. Invite the congregation to join you for an evening event at the church with snacks or dessert. Set up a stage and microphone, have an emcee to introduce everyone and make sure they stay

within their five minutes time limit. Put the storytellers' names in a hat. As the names are drawn, and the testimonies are shared, people will now know they are equipped and empowered to go to the ends of the earth sharing the Good News of the Gospel.

My God Story¹⁰

One fall morning, I woke up more sick than usual. I could barely make it to the bathroom before I threw up what was left in my stomach from the night before. Not only was I ill, but my hair was falling out by handfuls, the skin on my fingertips was peeling, I had sores in my mouth, everything tasted like metal, and in the previous two weeks I had lost nearly 20 pounds. I was too weak to take care of myself, but somehow, I had to find the energy to get the kids up, dressed, fed and drive them to school.

Just two months earlier, I had been working, leading Scout groups, and running the fall book fair for the elementary school. All of that came to jolting halt the day I went to the hospital with what I thought might be appendicitis. That trip to the E.R. led to three abdominal surgeries, two weeks in the hospital, and a colon cancer diagnosis. Colon cancer! I always thought that colon cancer was something that happened to elderly people, not a healthy, 36-year-old woman like me!

But now I was home, trying to create a sense of normalcy for my family, yet in reality, I was so weak that I had to rely on my young children far more than a parent should. The doctors told me that I needed at least six months of chemo treatments to give me the best chance of survival. In other words, I would have to be sick like this for six months before I could be healthy again!

On this cold November morning, I was too weak. I literally crawled from the bathroom to the kitchen and called a friend to help me get the kids ready and off to school and then I crawled back to bed.

Later that day, as I had regained some strength, I called my friend again to thank her for her help. In our conversation I told her that I was thinking about stopping chemo. The doctor told

me that my chances of survival were about 70% without treatment, and I thought that might be enough. She cut me off, mid-sentence and told me frankly, "Heidi, you are not going to end your chemo treatment. I know this is difficult, but you can do hard things. Your kids need you. The community needs you, and I won't let you give up." There I sat, still in my pajamas, not having brushed my hair or teeth, in a puddled mess of despair, sobbing as my friend spoke words of truth and courage to me. I didn't want to die, but I also didn't believe that I could survive six months of chemo.

The next morning a different friend showed up at my door to help get the kids fed, dressed, and off to school. When another mom brought them home that afternoon, she also brought dinner with her. Unbeknownst to me, I had an army of angels in the elementary school community—some who were close friends, and some who were parents that I didn't even know. They kept up this routine for a few weeks until the chemo side effects had subsided, and I had the strength to be a mom again to my kids.

As a Christian, I know that God is with me always. However, as a 36-year-old woman who was facing the fragility of her mortality, there were times I questioned God's presence. Some days I chose to believe in God, simply because it seemed like the best of all options. It was in moments like this however, through the compassion and generosity of people in the community, when the Holy Spirit showed up in the most unexpected ways, and I could actually *feel* her presence. And those moments reminded me that God did not abandon me, and with God I can do hard things, that my family does need me, that I am valued in the community, and that I am worthy of God's unconditional love.

10. [Link to the audio file of my God story.](#)