



How to Tell a Faith Story: A Workbook on Witnessing

Introduction

So, you want to tell a Faith Story? Or, someone who cares about you says you – yes, you – have a story about God to tell. Or, you do not *want* to tell your Faith Story as much as the Faith Story within you *has* to get out. The pressure of your story has built up within you, like boiling water in a kettle, and though the fear of talking about God in public would otherwise keep your mouth shut, the power of your story simply will not be contained. It must come out, and like steam leaving a kettle, there is noise that follows, joyful noise, the noise of someone who has seen or heard God and lived to tell the tale, the sound of testimony being released from captivity.

Welcome. This workbook will help you tell your Faith Story in worship, in a group of friends, to a complete stranger, or just to yourself lest you forget how important your Faith Story is to you.

The goal of “How to Tell a Faith Story” is to prepare you for the holy task of telling a true story of God at work in your life. This is not an exercise in preaching or evangelism, at least in the traditional, passing-out-tracts kind of way. This is an exercise in witnessing: simply talking about God in public because bearing witness to the activity of God in our lives is just what Christians do.

In my experience as a pastor, I’ve noticed that church folks tend to outsource witnessing to the preacher. All the God-talk and stories about faith intersecting with normal life, that’s the preacher’s job. Meanwhile, 99.9% of Christians are on the receiving end of witnessing, passive recipients of stories that happened to someone else, when it’s the 99.9% who have stories of their own, wonders and signs of God at work in their lives that yearn to be told. How many stories about the mercy of God has the world *not* heard because otherwise good and faithful Christians kept their mouths glued shut? How many hearts have *not* been stirred, how many lives *not* been transformed, how many worship services have *not* been set ablaze with God’s power because the only mouth in the body of Christ was the preacher’s?

A pastor friend named Melissa reminded me that, in our tradition, the United Methodist Church, we ask new members to promise to support the church with their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Most people have a good idea about the first four commitments, but witnessing, what’s that? Isn’t that what street preachers and Pentecostals do? Don’t we pay the preacher to witness so we don’t have to? No, witnessing is the calling of every disciple of Jesus. We are to bear witness to the mysterious movements of God in our lives, the glimpses of eternity that we were fortunate enough to live.

Instead of outsourcing the sacred task of witnessing, what if we accepted it as a normal Christian practice? Such an expectation requires training and courage: training because most mainline Protestant churches do not teach witnessing or incorporate witnessing into Sunday morning worship, and courage because public speaking is scary- that’s why we leave it to the professionals. This workbook, with God’s help, can assist with the training part. The courage part

is up to you. Jesus says, “Take heart, I have conquered the world (John 16:33).” Public speaking is part of the world that Jesus has conquered. Therefore, we can take heart. Talking about God in public may not be in your wheelhouse, but it is under Jesus’ feet. All the Christian must do is summit the shoulders of Christ, where our sorrows and sighs and celebrations already were, stand tall, take heart, and speak.

This workbook is intended to prepare a storyteller for telling their Faith Story in the context of Christian worship. Therefore, this workbook will use the word “congregation” instead of “audience.” Stories are told in front of many audiences: board rooms, classrooms, family living rooms, lunch tables with colleagues. What makes the audience a congregation is they have been assembled for the purpose of hearing someone talk about God. That someone is you, and your listeners are now your congregation. Also, words like “Faith story,” “witness,” “testimony,” and “story” will be used interchangeably because they all refer to the same brave act: speaking publicly about God at work.

However, this training applies to speaking publicly about God *anywhere*. Some will remember the days when talking about God at the office, at a dinner party, with your child’s teacher, on the train or bus, or in the family kitchen were commonplace, even expected. But now, God-talk has become a private thing, shunted to prayers you pray silently and confined to church buildings for one hour on Sunday. We look at society and wonder where God went. God never left the building; it’s our God-talk that stopped. It is because God is at work everywhere that Faith Stories can be told everywhere. Hopefully, this workbook will empower the telling of Faith Stories wherever the Spirit prompts and a heart is eager to listen.

This workbook is designed for use in a small group setting, though can also be used by individuals. Section 1 is a deep dive into the practice of testimony, what Scripture says about testimony, and what it does for us and in us. Section 2 is a definition of Faith Stories as a particular kind of testimony. Section 3 lays out the step-by-step method for designing your Faith Story. Section 4 argues for the Wesleyan band model as a rehearsal strategy for practicing your Faith Story and provides tips for the storyteller and the storylistener. The questions in each section are for personal reflection and group discussion. Though “How To Tell a Story” can be used by individuals, Section 4 will call for community to provide you with feedback and help you think theologically about your story. Faith Stories are told by individuals but always happen in community.

“How to Tell a Story” is the first step in a new ministry at my church, Faith United Methodist Church in Spring, Texas. The new ministry is called Wonders and Signs. The vision of Wonders and Signs is a community of storytellers who can’t stop talking about what God has done. Imagine a night of storytelling called Wonders and Signs, a podcast called Wonders and Signs, t-shirts saying Wonders and Signs. You get the idea. But to arrive at all that, there must be stories and storytellers, and even before that, we have to relearn how to tell stories. Here we are.

Finally, this workbook is indebted to The Moth, an international storytelling non-profit. The Moth's book *How To Tell a Story* is the guide and master instructor behind this workbook, and will be cited often. Consider this workbook a companion to *How to Tell a Story*. Do yourself a favor and buy the book *How to Tell a Story*. Then go and listen to The Moth on their website (www.themoth.org), on their podcast, or find them on the radio. You'll hear stories that speak about God without aiming to do so, making church a reality without intending it, for The Moth is not Christian but sure sounds like Christ. Faith Stories are meant to be Moth stories for church. Wonders and Signs is meant to be The Moth for church. Thank you, Moth.

Now, let's follow in the footsteps of Peter and John, who after being told to stop talking about Jesus, said, "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Let us speak of wonders and signs.

peace.

David

1

Reclaiming Testimony

First, what is a Faith Story? A Faith Story is a fresh take on the ancient Christian practice of testimony. Testimony is as old as Scripture itself, so it is to there we turn first.

Seeing Testimony in the Testimony of Scripture

A testimony is a personal story about a first-hand encounter with God. The Bible uses the word “testimony” or the related word “witness” when someone tells a story about a time they saw or experienced the power of God. The first occasion of testimony in the New Testament is John the Baptist. “He came as a *witness* to *testify* to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to *testify* to the light” (John 1:7-8). John is the prime example of the relationship between testifier and God. “A testifier is not the light,” writes Lillian Daniel, a pastor who led her mainline Protestant church to reclaim the practice of testimony, “but points us toward the light of God.”¹ The teller of Faith Stories is the finger pointing to God, saying, “Look! There was God! Let me tell you how I saw eternity.”

The New Testament is full of testimonies, especially in the book of Acts. Peter says on the day of Pentecost, “This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are *witnesses*” (Acts 2:32). A witness was what the early Christians *were*, not merely what they did. To be a disciple of Christ was to be a witness to Christ, plain and simple. As the first Christian preachers testified, the church grew in number of believers and likeness to Christ, in quantity and quality. “With great power the apostles gave their *testimony* to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” That grace, the very power of God, added to the church’s sheer size. Worship attendance went up!

*But that’s not all. Immediately following this verse, Acts remembers, “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.” (Acts 4:32-33). The testimony to the resurrection of Jesus led to the

¹ Lillian Daniel, *Tell It like It Is: Reclaiming the Practice of Testimony* (Herndon, Va: Alban Institute, 2006). xv.

elimination of poverty, hungry mouths fed, debts paid off, empty bellies and souls filled up, and the extravagant generosity of believers to meet the needs of the needy. Testimony was both a sign and an act of resurrection: testimony was words pointing to the reality of Jesus' resurrection for the believers, and testimony was the very means of death-to-life transformation in the lives of people who gave it and heard it. Peter defines his and his fellow apostles' role in the church around the practice of witnessing:

“We are *witnesses* to all that he [Jesus] did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as *witnesses*, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10:39-40).”

The Apostle Paul could not articulate his calling to preach the gospel without voicing his need to testify in the same breath. “I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to *testify* to the good news of God's grace.” (Acts 20:24). Paul testified to his own experience of Christ on the road to Damascus, how he was forgiven, let off the hook for crimes against humanity, and charged with extending the same grace to Gentiles, outsiders to the family of Israel, who like him were outsiders to grace no longer. Once an insider to grace, always an insider to grace- like Paul, like the Gentiles, like all.

Paul could see God's grace on the move in the Christian communities he knew. He testified to God at work in other people just as God moved in him. When remembering his friends in Macedonia, he writes, “For during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can *testify*, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means” (2 Corinthians 8:2-3). Christians bear witness to God at work in their lives and in the lives of others when they had a front row seat to see it.

Before Jesus ascends to heaven, he gives a clear command to the disciples, and to us: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my *witnesses* in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The practice of testimony isn't optional, it's an expectation. Jesus is counting on us to tell stories about him in and to the world, how he saved and is saving our lives. How else will the world know Jesus unless we tell true stories about Jesus?

The Greek word the Bible uses for “testimony” or “witness” is *martus*, which literally means an eyewitness. A *martus* is what a witness in court provides when they take the stand. The witness simply tells it as they remember it – not *saw* it, *remember* it. The witness may not remember all the details of what they saw. In fact, it's likely the witness will get many of the details wrong. Memory is fallible. It's hard enough to remember what you ate for lunch yesterday, much less if a person's shirt was red or blue three months ago, or what the license plate number was as the getaway car drove away. If you want to know *exactly* how an event

occurred with no errors in the remembering, a witness is not a reliable source. A video camera would be better. It's the witness's job to tell a story as they remember living the story. Getting all the facts right isn't as important as getting the message of the story right.

Also, when a witness takes the witness stand, it's not the witness's job to persuade, argue, or convince. Leave the persuading, the arguing, and the convincing to the lawyers. It's the witness' job to tell. That's it. The witness doesn't win someone over to their side or in any way convince people that they're right and someone else is wrong. The witness simply *tells*.

Therefore, witnessing is not preaching or proselytizing. In preaching, the preacher has one or more arguments to make. In proselytizing, the evangelist is working toward the goal of convincing an audience to make a statement of faith - in other words, convert them. While conversion would be an awesome *outcome* to witnessing – Jesus says the angels in heaven would rejoice! (Luke 15:10) – conversion is not the *goal* to witnessing. We witness for no other reason or purpose than to tell a true story. God may use the story as a seed for change in someone's life, but ultimately, that's above our pay-grade. It's not our job to talk people into a relationship with Jesus. That's what a salesperson would do, but we're not called to be salespeople; we're called to be witnesses. It's our job to tell stories to people; it's God's job to work a change in people.

The Power of Testimony

You might think that merely telling a story has no power – that without the persuasion and winning someone over to Jesus, there's no point to telling a story. Why on earth would I talk about God if I'm not talking for a purpose, an outcome, a change in my audience? And why would someone want to hear my story? Why should they care about the time I felt the presence and love of God in college, on my commute, climbing a mountain, or in a deep conversation with an old friend? Without the expectation of persuasion, on the speaker's part and the listener's, why speak and why show up to listen? Who cares?

Remember the word *martus* for “testimony” and “witness.” It's the origin of the English word “martyr.” Martyrs are people who died for their faith. We imagine martyrs as Christians who were thrown to the lions because they refused to say they were not Christian. Or, if there were no lions involved, we think martyrs are people who publicly take a stand for Christ and pay for it with their lives. All that is true, but why?

Because martyrs told a story about what Jesus meant to them *in public*. No martyr was ever martyred because they kept their faith private. But when they told a personal story about how God saved them, how they encountered Christ on their journey, how the Spirit showed up in their lives, and when other people heard that story, now the story has a power of its own. Now the story could change people's hearts, minds, and beliefs, which makes the story dangerous to people in power who would very much prefer their subjects remain as they were. But once a story is unleashed, there's no holding it back. Once a story is out there in the world, the story has

become a creative force for God to work with, to change lives, communities, even nations as the story is retold over and over again.

Storytelling is fuel for change. Remember Dr. King's story of black and white children playing together. That story changed things. Remember the story of our nation's founding: thirteen colonies bullied and taxed by a rich, greedy king. Remember the story of your parents meeting one another for the first time. Remember the story of your first major failure and how you got back up, eventually. Those stories changed things, and as we remember them and hear them told back to us, they change us again and again. Therein lies the power of testimony and the reason martyrs could tell a story and expect death: stories work on us. Storytelling fuels transformation.

What makes testimony different from and more powerful than simply "storytelling" is that testimony always involves God. Take God out, and it's not a testimony anymore. A testimony is not a testimonial. We hear testimonials on commercials and at funerals, and they pop up in our social media feeds. Testimonials are advertisements of the positive qualities of a person, thing, or service. A grandson might give a testimonial at his grandfather's funeral, how Granddaddy took him fishing and rewarded his good grades with cash money. The testimonial advertises the goodness of the person who has passed. We hear this kind of storytelling the most, as narratives about the positive traits of beloved people like at funerals, of fun or out-of-the-ordinary times like you hear from your coworker as he talks about his wild weekend at the beach, or of products and services you see for sale on TV and social media. Those testimonials advertise the person, place, or thing.

A testimony is different because the testimony advertises God. The testimony "points us back to God" even as the storyteller gives what would otherwise be a testimonial.² When the grandson talks about the fishing trips with this grandfather and calls us back to the story of Jesus, who sat with fishermen and taught them how to make greater use of their nets, now we have a testimony, for now the testimony is advertising God while at the same time bringing Granddaddy back to life.

When pastor Lillian Daniel reclaimed testimony in her church, she had to institute a rule: testimonies must not be Godless. "What could we testify to on Sunday mornings that we could not just as easily testify to on National Public Radio?"³ It might seem strange to make a rule that testimonies must not be Godless, but it makes sense for churchgoers in most mainline Protestant churches. The times we hear stories in church from non-pastors are: during fundraising campaigns, from friends talking for the sake of socializing, during the dreaded announcement time in worship, and at funerals. It's all too easy to leave God out of these, just as we do the rest of the week. But testimonies are acts of worship, and as such, return to God the first-hand accounts of how the storyteller saw or heard God. Testimonies cannot be Godless, for if they

² Daniel, *Tell It Like Is*, 101.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

were, testimonies would lose all power to worship God and make Christ real to people. As you prepare your testimony, God may be behind the scenes, or God could be front and center, showing off in the spotlight. You might not use the word “God” in your story at all. You might talk about Jesus, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Lord – it’s all language referring to the God we worship as disciples of Jesus. Or, your testimony might not use any word for God, but the story is clearly about what God has done in your life.

However! Throwing God into a story doesn’t make it a testimony. Telling a story about the time you went to Las Vegas for a bachelor party and survived a long weekend of casinos and losing and finding the other groomsmen (not like I would know), and throwing in the word “God” at the end is *not* a testimony. It’s a testimonial advertising a fun weekend. But telling a story about how God changed you on that same trip with that same cast of characters *is* a testimony. It’s the same event and the same people, but when told from the perspective of God at work in your life, now this trip is a testimony. The telling of this story about a bachelor party *and* the mystery of God *and* in church might spark a change in the heart of the listener or the teller.

Lillian Daniel reflects on what testimony did in her church. First, testifiers were initially scared or anxious to talk about God in public, but once they gave their testimony, fear and anxiety were replaced by “a feeling of freedom or elation.” Second, she discovered testimony begets testimony. One story about God leads to someone else telling another story about God, then that story sparks another Christian to speak, and so on. Testimony was contagious. Testimony opened up community in her church. “New relationships will be formed,” she writes, “based on what people have heard you say.”⁴ In other words, the reclamation of the practice of testimony inspired a church culture of freedom and joy, marked by God-talk gone viral and new friendships. Testimonies work on us, yes, at the level of the individual and the community, the believer and the church.

To Tell the Truth

At its heart, a testimony is a testimony because it is a true story about God, emphasis on *true*. A witness on the witness stands swears to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, for anything less than the truth robs the jury of information, or provides downright false information, and now a valid verdict is impossible. The world is the jury, asking, like Pontius Pilate, “What is truth?” Competitors for truth are everywhere, and people are hungry for what is really, eternally true. It is the Christian who supplies the truth.

For every competitor for truth is a story to back it up. There are stories everywhere – stories about what makes for a good life, stories that measure beauty by muscle and waist size, stories about how parents should *really* raise their children, stories about the doom of creation and immortality of money, or stories about the latest gossip. We’re bombarded with stories, and

⁴ Ibid., 147.

many are factual, but which are true? The Christian deals in telling the one true story – the story of the good and loving God we’ve met in Christ. Theologian Thomas Long, when writing about the role of testimony in the Christian life, says,

“The world is full of stories, but all of these billions of stories are searching for the one, true story, the story of a God who knows and loves us, the story of a God who brings justice to a broken world. Christians are on the witness stand to tell that story, not because it is a likely story or an advantageous piece of testimony, but because it is true. We know it is true because we ourselves have experienced it and witnessed its truth. That is why we are on the witness stand and have taken the oath to tell the truth, “so help us God.””⁵

It is not only the people out there who need to tell the truth. We do, too. Yes, we feel like we know the truth we have found in Christ, but can we articulate the truth? Can we give language to what we believe? Do we even know what we believe until we say it? “Always be ready,” says Peter, “to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15-16). There is a deep wisdom here. We must “always be ready” to speak about why we have hope in Christ, for in doing so, we will know what it is we believe in the first place.

*Yes, we should be ready to provide an answer when someone asks us why we bow our heads at the lunch table, why we give a hefty percentage of our money to the poor, why we refuse to use language that offends the light of God in us and others, or why we choose to forgive a coworker that no one else in the office will trust. We must be ready to supply an answer for the “hope that is within you,” yet there is a benefit beyond defending the faith that Peter might have seen, and that is talking ourselves into belief. It is in talking about our faith that we articulate what it is we believe in the first place. We could feel what we believe, and now that we can say it, we know what it is we felt. We speak, therefore, we believe.

Thomas Long writes, “We don’t just say things we already believe. To the contrary, saying things out loud is a part of how we come to believe. We walk our way *toward* belief, talk our way from tentative belief through doubt to firmer belief, talk our way toward believing more fully, more clearly, and more deeply.”⁶ Talking about God is the route belief travels, the highway we are always traveling as we work out what it is we actually believe. We talk our way *toward* belief, or as Long says, “we are always talking ourselves into being Christian.”⁷ The things we believe can be so fuzzy, we’re not quite sure what they are until we define them with language. Words make our faith real. Before, faith was a concept, an idea, maybe a feeling or a nudge. But we open our mouths and speak, and we talk ourselves into believing the thing we felt to be true, unconsciously knew to be true, hoped was true.

⁵ Thomas G. Long, *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian*, 1st ed, The Practices of Faith Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004). 29.

⁶ Long, *Testimony*, 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

Talking about God in public may sound intimidating, but we should ask ourselves, how different is talking about God in front of a congregation from talking about God with friends over dinner? The same machinery and tools are in use: mouths, words, ears, brains. The only difference is scale. A congregation is a lot bigger than a dinner party. But the process is the same. Instead of treating the process of testimony as us talking *others* into belief, what if we treated it as us talking *ourselves* into belief? For that is what happens at the dinner table when I start talking God-talk with friends: I'm not trying to convince them of anything, I'm merely using this conversation as the context to work out my own beliefs. I talk about God showing up in my child's folded hands as we pray before dinner, or God reaching out and touching me in the hands of a homeless neighbor, or in a strange dream I had last night that gave me insight into a problem at work. To the person at the next table listening in, they hear religious people having a religious conversation. But to me, the speaker, I'm betting everything on these words, hoping they will help me unpack the encounters with God I can't understand but were nonetheless real. I'm talking my way *toward* belief.

Imagine a stranger asking you, "Who is this Jesus? Don't give me the textbook answer. Who is Jesus *to you*?" You wouldn't be alone if your first instinct is to run and hide. Many of us can't find the right words. Claiming Christ and being able to express why you claim Christ are as far apart as saying you love the color of your children's eyes and finding the words to express why. Where could I possibly begin? But here is where talking about God in public can help: the words we say about God are the very building blocks of our faith in God. Words make faith on the inside a living reality on the outside, a thing we can understand, never fully, but at least dimly. We knew the truth about God in feeling only; in testimony, we put words to the truth we knew, and now we know what we believed. In the end, we do not witness for the purpose of converting someone. We witness so that *we* might be converted. We tell our Faith Stories, we give honest words, brave words, loving words to the beliefs and experiences hidden in our hearts, to make sense of what we believe about God. We speak about God, and we are converted – changed from belief as feeling to belief as understood. We speak, therefore, we believe.

Long tells the story of a Lutheran church in the Bronx. The church put on a Holy Week play to tell the events of Jesus' final days of ministry, from Palm Sunday through Easter. After the telling of the Easter story, three members of the church stood up to speak. They gave no facts or proof of resurrection. Instead, they told the *truth* about how they lived resurrection.

"I *know* that he is alive," each one was to begin. The first was Angie. "I know that he is alive," she said, "because he is alive in me." She then told how she was abused by her father, how she fell into despair and alcoholism, became HIV-positive. But then, she responded to the welcome of the church, then she started attending worship, then a Bible study, and bit by bit she rose from the grave of her life. Now she is a seminary student,

studying to be a pastor. “I am now alive because Jesus Christ lives I me and through me.”⁸

More people stood up to speak, totally unplanned. “Homeless people, addicts now clean, the least and the lost, stood one by one. Nothing could stop them. “I know that he is alive,” they shouted, all giving corroborating testimony to the witness of Jesus.”⁹ It is Jesus who is the truest and final witness to who God is and what God is doing in the world. It is our calling to give a “corroborating testimony” to the witness of Jesus – our words, our actions, and our lives backing up what he has to say. Our testimonies are only as true as they give an honest account of Jesus alive in us and through us.

How is it that God chose to show up in the world? Not as an idea, feeling, creed, or philosophy. God showed up as spoken word, a word that became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14). Our testimonies have the same incarnating power: when we speak, God puts on a uniform made of our words and lives among us again. Our words are not the same as God’s Word, but they *contain* God’s Word. Our God-talk is the packaging of the Word that God crossed the universe to speak.

Finally, let’s define testimony: A testimony is the telling of a true story of God at work, as remembered by the storyteller. A testimony is not:

- A factual record of events
- Preaching or proselytizing
- Persuasion, argument, or convincing
- Godless or a story with God thrown in

We’ll use this definition of testimony in this workbook going forward. When you see the phrase “Faith Story,” this definition of testimony is always implied.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

⁸ Long, *Testimony*, 31.

⁹ Ibid.

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “testimony”?

2. Have you ever heard a testimony in church? What was it like?

3. Why is it important to distinguish between a witness and an exact record? When might a witness be better than an exact record? What can witnessing do that an exact record can't?

4. Why are stories powerful? What makes stories influence people?

5. Which stories have meant the most to you? Which stories have changed your life, for good or ill?

6. What do you make of the phrase “I speak, therefore, I believe”? How does giving words to our faith help us understand our faith?

7. What do you make of the phrase, “Talking ourselves into being Christian”? How do we use everyday conversations and discussions at church to work out what we believe?

2

Defining Faith Stories

A Faith Story is a particular type of testimony. Faith Stories are stories told in the style of Moth Stories.

The Moth began over 25 years ago as a group of friends who sat around for hours and swapped stories. There was no agenda, no production. It was just friends telling stories. The founder of The Moth, author George Dawes Green, drew inspiration from his aunt's porch outside Savannah, Georgia. She and her family would sit outside, tell stories long into the night, and watch the moths fly around the porch lights hanging from the ceiling. In 1997, George invited a few friends to a party in his New York City living room. He called it The Moth, an homage to the insects that overheard his family's stories.¹⁰

The Moth expanded from George's living room to an international non-profit agency whose mission is "to promote the art and craft of storytelling and to honor and celebrate the diversity and commonality of the human experience."¹¹ The Moth has a popular radio show and podcast (highly recommended!) and hosts live storytelling events around the world, including in Houston, Texas.

The Moth is not a faith-based agency. The Moth is about storytelling, not testimony-giving. However, The Moth has been honing the art of storytelling for over two decades and has much to teach the church about how to tell a story. The Moth is an example of how the Spirit uses people outside the organized church to make a difference in the organized church from the outside-in.

Stop reading right now and search for The Moth podcast or visit www.themoth.org. The podcast and the website features *The Moth Radio Hour*, which is a full hour of Moth stories, and

¹⁰ Bowles, Meg, Catherine Burns, and Jenifer Hixson. *How to Tell a Story*. First Edition. New York: Crown, 2022. 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

other Moth stories that are featured within their own episodes. Listen to an episode or two. You'll get a sense of what a Faith Story is. Keep a few things in mind:

- Most Moth stories are told at StorySLAMS, where anyone off the street can tell a five-minute story on the night's theme. You buy a ticket, put your name in a hat, and if your name is drawn, then you are the next storyteller.
- Moth Stories are told without notes. That means the people telling these stories have no paper or words, podium or pulpit in front of them. It's just them, a microphone, and the audience.
- Moth Stories are told in front of a live audience. Most of them are strangers to the storyteller.
- Since The Moth is not a faith-based group, you might hear language and material that you would not want young children to hear, so be mindful who else is listening.

Questions:

1. Which stories did you listen to? Who told them? What were they about?
2. How did the storytellers change from the beginning of their story to the end?
3. Why did the storyteller care enough about this story to tell it?

Four Rules from The Moth

This workbook is a companion to a book published by The Moth’s senior staff called *How to Tell a Story*, a marvelous book that walks the reader through The Moth’s method of storytelling. Many of the instructions in this workbook come from *How to Tell a Story*.

Moth-style storytelling follows a few rules. Think of the rules as community standards. Moth events are open to the public. The hosts do not know who will be giving stories that night. The hosts have not seen or heard the stories beforehand. Who knows what will come out of the next storyteller’s mouth? Community standards are needed to set values for what will and will not be tolerated.

Let’s define seven rules for telling Faith Stories. We’ll use four rules from The Moth,¹² then add three more in the next section.

1. Faith Stories are true and told out loud, in the first person.

Remember “true” is not the same thing as “correct.” The storyteller isn’t aiming for perfect historical accuracy, but rather faithful memory of the story as the storyteller recalls it. The story should not be a work of fiction or “made up” to sound like the storyteller lived this story when, in fact, it’s fabricated. A Faith Story is a true story about an event or series of events that actually happened and which the storyteller personally experienced.

Faith Stories are told out loud. There’s a difference between public *writing* and public *speaking*. You might write the world’s perfect story, the next Aesop’s fable. But can you speak it? Writing is a different skill from speaking. The goal is for the story to leave the page and take a life of its own as you tell it to a live congregation.

Faith Stories use “I” and “We” language. You are telling a story you personally experienced. You are *not* telling someone else’s story. You may love to tell the story of your grandfather walking out of his eighth-grade classroom because he thought he was smarter than the teacher, never to return to school again (yes, my Granddaddy did that). But that’s a story in the third person. It’s someone else’s story to tell because it’s *about* them. Faith Stories are stories only you can tell because only you lived them.

2. Faith Stories are not read or recited.

The Moth hosts storytelling events called StorySLAMS where anyone can drop their name in a hat and, if selected, tell a five-minute story based on the night’s theme. The production is simple, cheap, and terrifying. I told a story at StorySLAM in Houston. I stood on stage in front of a microphone, facing an audience, and the only person I knew out of the almost 300 people in attendance was my wife. I did not have a podium, a music stand, or any furniture to hide behind. Neither was I allowed notes, manuscript, or any piece of paper. I had to speak from the heart.

¹² Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 14.

Faith Stories follow a similar method. Faith Storytellers do not use notes or a written manuscript. The storyteller may have – no, they *should* have – prepared material, but they leave the prepared material in their seat. When they speak, they speak not from a page but from memory.

Of course, that begs the question, “How do I prepare for this? Should I write a story and memorize it? HELP!” We’ll get to the story preparation a little later, but for now, please know there’s a difference between telling and reciting. In reciting, the goal is to recall a script word-for-word, with as much accuracy to the script as possible. In telling, the goal is to share an experience with people who haven’t lived it. The purpose of reciting is performing a script. The purpose of telling is sharing an experience. Reciting is good for actors who want to knock a monologue out of the park. But telling is good for the rest of us who lived through an experience and now we want other people to live that experience with us.

That does not mean Faith Stories are unprepared. They are prepared! There’s work involved – that’s why you’re here. But preparation is not recitation. It is the difference between telling the story of the birth of your first child – the rush to the hospital, the pushing, the squeezing Dad’s hand, the sound of your baby’s first cry – and reciting your child’s Social Security number on cue. In one, you remember a story, you learn the order of the events by heart, and simply tell what happened. In the other, you memorize a piece of paper for 100% accuracy. Faith Stories are like the former, not the latter.

3. Faith Stories always involve stakes and some sort of transformation.

There has to be a “Why should we care?” to any Faith Story. Those are the stakes. The stakes are why this story is important to you. *How To Tell A Story* puts it perfectly: “Clear stakes establish why *you* care, which tells us why *we* should care.”¹³

It’s not enough to say, “I lost a bracelet in the hotel room but found it ten minutes later.” Yes, there is a story there – something was lost, then I found it. But why do you care enough about this story to tell it in public? Be crystal clear on this. The stakes might be: “My husband gave me this bracelet for our 30th wedding anniversary in a season where we were both caring for our aging parents and after we’d just buried his mother. He couldn’t come on this trip because he had to stay home and work. Losing this bracelet is like losing a piece of the man I love the most in the world, and if I can’t find it, it’s like I don’t love him as much as he loves me.” Now we have stakes. Now we know why this story is important to you.

Faith Stories also need transformation. If stakes are the *why* to the story, transformation is the *what*. Transformation is what happened to you to make you a different person from beginning to end. How did you, the storyteller, change? *How To Tell A Story* says,

¹³ Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 51.

The change is the structural frame that helps you build out your overall arc in the story. An arc, put simply, is: Who were you at the beginning of the story, and who were you at the end? How do you live your life differently as a result of the events in the story, and why is that consequence meaningful to you?¹⁴

Adding to that description, a Faith Story asks, how did your faith change because of the events in this story? How did this encounter with God, or something that must have come from God, make you a different person? How did your beliefs change, and why is this important to you?

We'll come back to the idea of a story arc. For now, remember a story arc is the transformation of you, the storyteller, from beginning to end. The arc is not the plot. The plot is the sequence of events: this happened, then this happened, then this, then finally this. The arc is transformation of the character: I started this way, then all this crazy stuff happened, now I'm changed, and here's what it means to me.

4. Faith Stories are told within a specific time frame.

At a Moth StorySLAM, storytellers have five minutes, with a one-minute grace period, to tell their story. Storytellers will hear a sound, like a note on a piano or tinkling of a bell, when they hit five minutes, letting them know they have one more minute to wrap it up.

Faith Storytellers will also have five minutes to share their story (and the all-important one-minute grace period). The time limit is important because it establishes a clear expectation *for the congregation* about how long this story should go. Without the expectation, the congregation may begin to feel held hostage by the storyteller. "When will this person land the plane? I need to go to the bathroom!"

You may have been in situations where you felt captive to someone who just would not stop talking. Maybe it was at the office coffee machine and your coworker would not stop talking about his wild weekend at the lake. Or, heaven forbid, you were at a funeral, and a friend of the family would not stop talking about how sweet and friendly this person was, and every time you think this person is going to land the plane and sit down, they keep talking to the embarrassment of the family. No one wants to be that person. The time limit helps.

Questions:

¹⁴ Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 65.

1. What is your first reaction to the first four rules for telling Faith Stories? What surprises you? What scares you? What excites you?
2. When have you heard bad storytelling? When did the storytelling make you feel uncomfortable?
3. Is there a story coming to mind right now? Why do you care about this story? What does the story mean to you?

Three More Rules

The four rules above are from *How to Tell A Story*. Since The Moth is not a Christian organization, there are no explicit rules for incorporating God into your story, though there are many Moth stories that do invoke God and faith. But for the sake of clarity, we will add three additional rules for Faith Stories.

5. Faith Stories are testimonies of God at work in the storyteller's life.

Faith Stories are not Godless. While the storyteller may not explicitly use words like God, Jesus, Christ, faith, or disciple, it must be clear to the congregation that this person is telling this particular story *because of* an encounter with God or an experience of faith.

This rule might be the hardest of all because it is not always clear when and how God is working in our lives. This is the task of what is called theological reflection. “Theological reflection,” according to theologian Robert Kinast,

is the discipline of exploring our individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage. The conversation is a genuine dialogue that seeks to hear from our own beliefs, actions, and perspectives, as well as from those of the tradition. It respects the integrity of both.¹⁵

The search for God at work in our lives is a “discipline.” It’s real work. This work happens “in conversation” with our faith. This conversation looks like searching the Scriptures

¹⁵ Kinast, R. (1990). *Let Ministry Teach*. Maderia Beach, FL: Center for Theological Reflection. 3.

for places where your story intersects with the stories in the Bible. You may also know some history about your family's faith, your church's legacy, and the heritage of your particular faith tradition, like United Methodism for Faith. We place our "beliefs, actions, and perspectives" – and our stories – in conversation with the faith we find in Scripture and which we inherited from our family, friends, and church.

Your Faith Story is the fruit of theological reflection. You remember a moment when God was real to you, or when God felt far away, or when there was a change in your faith, or any time or season that is important to your journey as a person of faith. Then, you put those memories in conversation with what you believe, knowing that "what you believe" is a product of what you're reading in your Bible, what you're learning in church, and what you heard about God from the cradle until now. You mix all that together, and there it is – your story.

How do we do this? Keep going! We'll get to theological reflection in the next section of this workbook.

6. Faith Stories are Christian.

It may sound odd that we have to institute a rule about stories being Christian in a church setting, but it's important to distinguish between a Faith Story and any story you'd hear about anything else. A Faith Story is *not* a story you would tell when you are pitching a new idea to a board of executives, or a tall tale about the huge fish you caught, or a recount of the near-death, now-hilarious stunts of your twenties. Your Faith Story might include those moments, and maybe they should. But ultimately, your Faith Story isn't *about* those moments. Your Faith Story is about the change that happened to you because God was at work.

This is a story you're telling *as* a Christian. You may want to talk about the crazy party in college when you were young and careless, but how would you tell that story *as* a Christian? Were you in the car when a friend got behind the wheel after too many drinks, and you had to make the decision to take the keys or not because you were the Christian in the car? Or maybe you were the one who had the keys, and this was the moment you realized you needed to change the role partying played in your life because someone spoke the truth in love to you *as* a Christian?

To say that Faith Stories are Christian is also to say they are inclusive of any and all people and traditions that claim Christ. A Faith Story isn't United Methodist – it's Christian.

Faith Stories follow a "big table" theory of Christianity. Imagine a gigantic dinner table, huge enough for thousands of seats and plenty of room for more. There's room enough for everyone. Christ is the host at the table. He is the place where we gather for hope and joy. He is what binds us together. He is our common story. No one can be "inside" or "outside" this table gathering; there is no boundary that says someone is in or out. What makes someone "Christian" isn't their location inside or outside a boundary; it's their relationship to the person at the center.

The table is as Christian as the cross. The table is where Jesus puts his method of ministry into practice. The method can be summarized as, “Welcome everybody. Bring what you can. Share with those who have little. Enjoy.” The Pharisees and scribes criticize Jesus because he sat at the table with “tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 5:29). Another Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner at his house, and when a woman, “who was a sinner,” bathes the feet of Jesus with her hair, the Pharisee accuses Jesus of letting a sinner touch him (Luke 7:39). But it is there, at the table, that Jesus forgives the woman of her sins, proclaiming her made well. At other tables, Jesus advises that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and the humbled will be exalted (Luke 14:7), and when Christians throw parties, we should invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.” (Luke 14:13). And it is at a table that Jesus appears after his resurrection, to disciples who had given up hope because Jesus is dead and that’s that – but as they search the Scriptures and break bread together at the table, they see Jesus in the flesh (Luke 24:35).

Christ *is* the table where tax-collectors and sinners are welcome, where the caged-in body and mind are forgiven, where we serve one another as we would serve the Lord himself, where the poor and oppressed are shown hospitality, and where anyone and everyone can show up looking for Jesus and expect to find him. Around a table, what makes a Christian a “Christian” is their *relationship* to the Christ who invited them, not their *agreement* with the people who were also invited. Faith Stories will follow the same table logic of what makes a Christian a “Christian.”

Paul Hiebert was a missionary turned theologian who was curious about what made someone “Christian.” He found that there were two dominant modes of thinking: bounded-set and centered-set. Bounded-set thinking says someone is a Christian based on whether or not they fall within a clear boundary of beliefs and practices, such as remembering a moment-in-time conversion experience, or a public profession of faith in Jesus, or adherence to a code of beliefs.¹⁶ A metaphor for bounded-set thinking is horses belonging to different owners grazing in the same field.¹⁷ How can the owners tell which horses belong to them? They put the horses in a fence. The fence establishes a clear boundary of “us” versus “them.” If Faith Stories followed bounded-set thinking, then the only people who could tell Faith Stories and say they were “Christians” would be people who could sign-off on a statement of faith that defined what it is we believe around here. There would be a boundary of “we’re the Christians” and “you’re not.”

But Faith Stories follow centered-set thinking. Centered-set thinking organizes the category “Christian” by “defining a center or reference point and the relationship of things to that center” so that Christians are people who “move toward, or are in relationship to, a common

¹⁶ Yoder Michael et al., “Understanding Christian Identity in Terms of Bounded and Centered Set Theory in the Writings of Paul G. Hiebert of Paul,” *Trinity Journal* 30, no. 2 (January 1, 2009): 177–88. 181.

¹⁷ Jeremy Myers, “Bounded Sets and Centered Sets,” *Redeeming God*, November 5, 2011, <https://redeeminggod.com/bounded-sets-centered-sets/>.

center or reference point.”¹⁸ Of course, the center is Christ. A “Christian” in centered-set thinking is someone who places Christ at the center of their lives. This person may be moving toward or away from Christ, but who is to know? And who are we to judge? To use the horse metaphor again, the horse owner knows which horses belong to him by seeing which horses go to the common well for water. There is no fence, no “in” and “out.” If the owner sees a horse going to the well, or even approaching the well, then he knows the horse is his.

Faith Stories follow centered-set thinking because Faith Stories are larger than the doctrinal and denominational issues that divide members of the body of Christ. Indeed, Faith Stories should transcend those issues and serve as a bridge across those issues. There are no “conservative” or “progressive” Faith Storytellers. There are only Christians who claim Christ as their center. There are no “liberals” or “traditionalists” here. There are only Christians who claim Christ as their center.

7. Faith Stories are representations of Jesus.

Representation in this context means “re-presentation,” as in, it’s your turn to present Jesus to the world. Your Faith Story may be the first time someone has ever heard an ordinary, non-clergy person tell a public story about what faith means to them. For that one person, they will learn about Jesus, who he is and what he means, in and through your story. For others, your Faith Story may be the first time someone hears a Christian talk publicly about their faith in a non-judgmental, non-political way. For that one person, your story may be the nudge they needed to give Jesus another try. Faith Stories are *public*, and as public, they have the power to change a person’s perception of God, Christianity, Christ, and his church.

Therefore, the importance of Faith Stories honoring the highest standards of Christian living cannot be overstated. That means no rude or hateful speech, no judgement of people who look or believe differently from you, no politicking, partisanship, or preaching.

The Moth is a good teacher here. There’s a poster hanging at every StorySLAM titled “StorySLAM Dont’s.” Most of the text of the poster is reproduced below.¹⁹ Consider these “Dont’s” as things Jesus would not do, either. Keep these out of your FaithStory.

- **Please don’t** caricature or “explain” a culture that is not your own (e.g., putting on fake accents or telling us about the “customs” of a community you don’t belong to).
- **Please don’t** make another person’s identity (class, gender, race, orientation, body type, etc.) the punchline... or the story line. **Your story, your struggles.**
- **Please don’t** use another’s identity as a prop or plot point. (If you choose to include another person’s race, orientation, physical appearance or able-bodiedness, be sure that it is intrinsic to the story.)

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 22.

- **Please don't** celebrate unwanted sexual advances in your story.
- And of course, **NEVER** use racial slurs or hate speech.

Here are the seven rules of Faith Stories again for quick reference:

1. Faith Stories are true and told out loud, in the first person.
2. Faith Stories are not read or recited.
3. Faith Stories always involve stakes and some sort of transformation.
4. Faith Stories are told within a specific time frame.
5. Faith Stories are testimonies of God at work in the storyteller's life.
6. Faith Stories are Christian.
7. Faith Stories are representations of Jesus.

Questions:

1. Let's practice theological reflection.
 - Think of one moment from your previous week. It could be a huge, impactful moment, or a memory of something small. Whatever it is, this moment has to mean something to you. This moment must be worth sharing with others.
 - What Scripture story comes to mind as you reflect on this moment? What are the parallels between Scripture and your story?
 - How does this moment intersect with your beliefs as a Christian? Think of concepts like church, salvation, forgiveness, love, and God's presence. How did this moment amplify one or more those concepts? How did this moment challenge or make your question one or more of those concepts?

- Imagine having a conversation with another Christian about this experience. What would you talk about *as* Christians? How would you speak of God, the Bible, your faith, and how this story is growing, challenging, or clarifying your faith?

2. What makes someone a Christian according to bounded-set thinking? What makes someone a Christian according to centered-set thinking? Why is it important that Faith Stories use centered-set thinking?

3. Why is the image of the table important for storytelling and story listening?

4. How might storytelling bridge gaps between Christians? How can witnessing to our faith bring Christians together and lead to empathy for Christians we disagree with?

5. When have you heard someone talk about God but *not* represent Christ well? What did they say or do that made their testimony less like Christ even though the person claimed Christ?

3

Working the Process

So, how does one tell a Faith Story? There's a process, a method. Let's start with the building blocks.

- The Memory
- The Transformation
- The One Sentence
- The Stakes
- The Arc
- The Entrance and the Exit
- The Stepping Stones

We'll take each of these building blocks one by one. Remember, this is a workbook, so *work the book*. Have a pen or pencil ready. As we go along, there will be space for you to write out each building block of your Faith Story. By the end of this section, you'll have the material you need to tell your first story. You can always come back to this section and work the method again each time you want to tell a Faith Story.

To assist on this journey, I'll use the story I told at a Moth StorySlam in Houston: the story of my ordination as a United Methodist elder.

The Memory

Your Faith Story begins as a memory. Call back a memory of a time that is important to you and your faith journey. Your immediate response may be, "How is that possible? Nothing important has ever happened to me." Or you may be so overwhelmed with possibilities that you don't know where to start. Here are a few tips.

- You need to be the main character of the memory. This is not someone else's story. You may love to talk about your uncle and how he was a legend in his church, but his story is not your Faith Story. A Faith Story would talk about a time your uncle taught you a bit of wisdom about faith, or you discovered your uncle in a moment of hypocrisy that made you question your faith. Now, the Faith Story involves your uncle but is *about* you and your faith journey.

- When was something out of the ordinary? You were driving your daily commute, then you were rear-ended. You picked up your child from school as usual, then she said something that made you question whether you're a good parent or not.
- What was the inciting incident? An “inciting incident” is the event that kicks off the story.²⁰ You made a decision that changed everything. You said yes to the blind date. You took a wrong turn. You chose *not* to take the job to stay at home with the kids. Or something happened *to* you: you were dumped by the love of your life, or your parents sat you down to let you know they were separating.
- You chose to act or not to act. There was a moment you had to make a choice – you came to a fork in the road and the rest of the story unfolds from there.
- What is a story other people ask you to tell? Imagine you are with a group of friends or at a family reunion. Someone says, “Hey, tell them about the time you...” or “Remember when you...” If a memory about you stands out to other people, chances are it's story-worthy.

If you're having trouble thinking of a memory, here are prompts to try:

God

- When did you feel God's presence like you never have before?
- How did you discover who Jesus meant to you?
- When did you hear God calling you to something new?

Faith

- When did faith become real for you, more than rules and beliefs?

²⁰ Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 3.

- When did you lose faith?
- When did you come home to faith?
- When did you have to make a hard choice because of your faith?
- What was a “first step” of your faith journey?
- When did you take a “next step” on your journey?

Bible

- Where do you see yourself in a Scripture story, and why?
- When did you wrestle with the, or abandon the Bible altogether?
- What have been your most powerful moments of Bible study?

Transitions

- When did everything change for you?
- When were the significant deaths and births?
- When did you make a life-changing decision?

Family

- When did you depart from the faith of your family?

- When did you not see eye-to-eye with your family?
- What are the family demons (or angels!)?

Work

- When did your work, paid or unpaid, really matter to you?
- When did it feel like you were wasting your time at work and it was time to make a change?
- What were the major conflicts at work and why were they important?

Write out your memory below. There's no need for lots of words. A few sentences will do. The point is to call the memory to mind.

For example: I remember being carried out of my ordination service by two big pastors in black robes. I had obviously fainted during the Apostle's Creed. I had food poisoning and was almost lethally dehydrated. The bishop ended up ordaining me on a stretcher.

My Memory is:

The Transformation

The folks at The Moth distinguish between an anecdote and a story. An anecdote is “a short, amusing account of a real incident or person.” But a story is “beyond a string of

occurrences; it deals with evolution. If you don't want or need anything, it's not a story. A good story builds. By the end, things have intrinsically changed.”²¹

In a word, the difference between anecdote and story is transformation. If you are not a different person by the time you end the story, it's an anecdote. If you have changed, it's a story.

Take the memory you wrote down and search for the transformation. How did this experience change you? How are you different because of what you went through? Remember, this is a Faith Story, so look for what God did or how your faith changed. How did you grow *as* a Christian? Or maybe this is the story of the time you became a Christian, or first felt the inkling of God's love in your life? Or perhaps this is the story about when you threw faith away, at least for a while.

Looking for the transformation in your story calls for theological reflection. Put simply, where was God at work in your story? It's a big question. Thankfully, we have a tool in the United Methodist tradition to help us: the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

Though John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, never used the term, United Methodists trace the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” – Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason – back to John Wesley because he used all four to work out his own theology in his sermons. Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience are four sources, or ways of knowing, God is at work. Scripture is primary, and the other three play supporting roles. Think of the quadrilateral as a “four-way conversation” where Scripture has the dominant, most-respected voice, but tradition, experience, and reason always have a part to play.²²

Where is God in your story? First, look to Scripture. What stories or passages from the Bible speak to your story? Where does the Bible parallel your story? Where does the Bible challenge you or convict you?

Then go to tradition. Usually the “tradition” we borrow from is the faith legacies of our families and churches. How does your story intersect with the beliefs of your parents? Is this a story of a time you departed from the faith of your parents? Did your story make you question a part of your faith you always assumed was true? Or maybe your story deconstructed a part of the faith you received as a child or teenager, then built it back up in a way you understand? Were you at odds with your church? Did your church abandon you? Kick you out? Shame you? Or did your church lift you up and celebrate you?

²¹ Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 60.

²² F. Belton Joyner, *United Methodist Questions, United Methodist Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*, Second Revised edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014). 76.

What was your experience of God in your story? Maybe you felt the physical presence of God. Or maybe it was a slight nudge. Or, there was no feeling of God at all but you heard a calling, a vocation to do something new, something that made a difference in the world.

How did you use your reason? God gave us intelligence on purpose! Is this a story where you worked out what you believed about God for the first time? Were you questioning or doubting something you had always thought was true? What element of faith were you wrestling with?

By working through the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, we can see how the events of our story changed us, which is another way of saying, we can discover how God was working on us. The four-way conversation of the Quadrilateral is a means of finding the transformation in our Faith Story.

Your Faith Story shouldn't be a summary of your theological reflection. Saying, "this is what happened to me, and this is the Scripture I thought of, and this is how I reasoned my way through it," isn't a story; it's an explanation. Your theological reflection work is the foundation of your Faith Story, but it isn't the Faith Story. Your theological reflection is a means of figuring out what your Faith Story is all about.

For Example:

Scripture: The pastors who carried me out of my ordination service remind me of the "stretcher-bearers" in Mark 2:4. A group of friends wants Jesus to heal their friend who is paralyzed, but of course their friend can't walk, so they carry him on a stretcher to Jesus. They even carve a hole in the roof to get their friend to Jesus!

Also, when I was ordained with a bunch of pastor friends around me, praying over me while I laid on a stretcher, hooked up to an EKG, I remember feeling wrapped up in community. I had discovered an Acts 2 kind of community, a true fellowship of believers who had my back, and I had theirs.

Tradition: I learned, at the deep level of the heart, what it means to be part of a church community. My pastor family that surrounded the stretcher, my "stretcher-bearers," were a sign of church in its purest form.

Experience: In the moment, while I was being ordained on a stretcher with these people praying for me and around me, I felt an overwhelming sense of awe. I was in the presence of God.

Reason: As I think back on this moment, I realize I came to Texas not knowing anyone except my wife. We moved here to be in ministry, but I didn't know the people I'd be in ministry with. I was alone. I was a stranger. My ordination service was a kind of adoption: I was claimed by a family.

My Theological Reflection:

Scripture(s):

Tradition:

Reason:

Experience:

The One Sentence

Now it is time to summarize your story in one sentence. Your one sentence should *not* be a run-on sentence that is more like a paragraph than a sentence. Your one sentence will be your north star as you continue to build your story: it will remind you why you're doing this, what your story is all about, and what you want the audience to hear.

Your one sentence is more than a sequence of events; it's the purpose of your story. Your one sentence needs to include the memory you recalled *and* the transformation that happened to you. You're summarizing what the story is about and why it matters to you.

How To Tell a Story says the one sentence is the “trailer” of your story.²³ If your story is a movie, what is the trailer on YouTube? How will you tell yourself what the story is about in the most condensed, teaser-friendly way?

How To Tell a Story uses the example of a story by an Asian-American woman. She remembers when her father’s Chinese grocery store burned to the ground in Boston’s Chinatown. The plot of the story follows the five-alarm fire that destroyed the grocery store, but the fire isn’t ultimately what the story is *about*. The story moves on to the community’s grief at the loss of their grocery store, which was the gathering place of the neighborhood. The grocery store was the only place they could find the foods of their homeland. The story then moves to the community’s support of the woman’s father and family. The story becomes the story of a daughter seeing her father as other people see him: as a respected community leader. The one sentence of the story is: *It took a disaster for me to appreciate the important role my father played in our community.*²⁴

Your one sentence is about your story, but it’s *for* you. As you continue this hard work of preparation, your one sentence will be your guide.

For Example: I passed out at my ordination service and woke up to the truth of Christian community.

My One Sentence:

²³ Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 68.

²⁴ Ibid.

The Stakes

The stakes are one way of saying, “Why do you care about this story?” What’s the urgency? What did you stand to gain or lose? Where’s the tension? If it’s not clear why the story is important to you, then it won’t be clear to the audience, who will start wonder “Wait, why is this person talking?”

How To Tell a Story talks about internal stakes versus external stakes.²⁵ Internal stakes are happening inside your head. No one else can see these stakes or hear the voices inside you, but to you the volume is turned all the way up. What if this date doesn’t work out and I’m alone forever? Will my parents accept me? Am I good enough to be here?

External stakes are stakes anyone else could see. There’s a dog chasing me down the street! Rent is due tomorrow and I’m five hundred dollars short. My brother just told me he has six months to live.

Most stories will mix internal and external stakes. The point is to make them clear. If you, the storyteller, isn’t clear on the stakes, it will show in the storytelling. Imagine sitting with your coworkers in the break room and your coworker starts talking about his family’s trip to the lake last weekend. He goes on about the boat they rented, the waves they surfed, the food they ate, and the glorious sunset that night. Five minutes go by, and no one at the table is sure why the coworker is telling the story, and everyone would very much like to leave. The stakes aren’t clear. Had your coworker shared that his wife had decided to end cancer treatment and this lake trip was probably her last family vacation, then no one would have even thought of leaving the break room.

For Example: Ordination as a United Methodist elder is at least a six-year process. It took me seven years of interviews, seminary, and internships. I was not about to miss my ordination service because of a stupid little thing like food poisoning.

My Stakes:

²⁵ Ibid., 57.

The Arc

Now it's time to start building your Faith Story. The arc will be the bare bones of your story. The arc has less to do with the plot and more to do with your transformation. The arc is the growth of you, the main character, as you continue on your faith journey. Your arc needs a beginning, a change, and an ending.

The beginning is who you were at the beginning of the story. You'll want to sketch out a summary of the "beginning you."

The change is the action of the story. It's the main event, the adventure, or the decision that takes the story from A to B.

The ending is who you became by the end of the story. The "ending you" is different somehow because you went through the change.

How to Tell a Story gives a few examples²⁶ of changes that drive character development:

Physical (out of shape → now running marathons)

Situational (terrible marriage → divorced and fancy free)

Emotional (dreading each day → now happy to wake up)

Behavioral (lover of bacon → vegan)

Attitudinal (hated dogs → now you have three)

These examples show the range of change, from small and purely personal (Now I'm a vegan!) to huge life transitions (I'm no longer can't-get-out-of-bed depressed.) Your Faith Story will fall somewhere in this range. You might feel pressure to make your change bigger than it really is, but don't give in! It's your Faith Story, not someone else's.

STOP

For example:

The Beginning: I'm about to be ordained. I don't know what a clergy family feels like yet. I'm sick and exhausted.

The Change: I stand up for the Apostle's Creed and faint due to dehydration, triggering a 911 call which summons the paramedics. They place me on a stretcher. The bishop ends the

²⁶ Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 66.

ordination service, walks out of the hotel ballroom where the service was happening, and ordains me right on the stretcher. I'm surrounded by a clergy family.

The Ending: I feel in my bones what it's like to belong to a people, a tribe, a family who has my back, and I have theirs. I understand church at a fundamental level.

My Arc:

The Beginning:

The Change:

The Ending:

The Entrance and the Exit

By this point in the workbook, you've probably wondered if you should write out your story word-for-word and if you should memorize it. The answer is: only the Entrance and the Exit.

How To Tell a Story distinguishes between familiarization and memorization.²⁷ Familiarization is making yourself comfortable with the flow of the story (we'll get to this in the next section). Memorization is precise recall of every word of the story in exact order. For example, you may have had to memorize the Periodic Table of the Elements in high school. There's no substitution for memorization: you can either fill in a blank Periodic Table on the chemistry test, or you can't. The goal is 100% precision.

But that's not familiarization, and nor is that the goal of storytelling. Familiarization is more like navigating your favorite grocery store. You've been to your grocery store so many times, you could find the produce and the peanut butter with your eyes closed. You know where to find the cereal, the pasta, and the tomatoes, but it's not like you memorized their location. No

²⁷ Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 194.

one moves into a new neighborhood, finds a grocery store, and memorizes the floor plan. No, you familiarize yourself with the place. You get a feel for it. You learn the flow of the store. Think of your Faith Story like your favorite grocery store: the goal is comfort with the flow of the place, not memorization of the floor plan.

The exception to familiarization is the entrance and the exit. The entrance will open the story, and the exit will close the story. You want to “stick” the entrance and the exit like an Olympic gymnast sticks the landing. Thankfully, entrances and exits are short, only a sentence or two each, but when they’re done well, they’re the most powerful parts of the story. You’ll want to write out the entrance and the exit word-for-word, be comfortable with them, rehearse them, and land them.

The entrance sets the stage for the rest of the story. Drop us directly into the action. There is no need for set-up or explanation. Just start telling the story. Also, starting with “This is the story of the time...” or “I want to tell you about the time...” is so generic, it could be anyone’s story. Tell *your* story. Drop us into the action without any set-up. Don’t worry: the audience will catch up.

Every entrance will introduce a few core questions that will need to be resolved by the time the story ends. Will she leave this guy, or try the long distance relationship? Will this person ever talk to his father again? Will they ever give church another try? You may not ask those questions explicitly, but the audience can tell they are implied.

The exit will need to resolve those questions. The exit should leave the audience feeling satisfied, like the core existential questions of the story have been managed – maybe not totally answered, but addressed. An exit doesn’t work when the audience is left wondering, “Wait? What just happened?” The exit will close the loop that the entrance opened.

Also, a good exit will avoid meandering. You’ve probably heard a public speaker (likely a preacher!) get to the end of their speech, and instead of landing the plane, they pull back up and circle the runway. They come back down for a landing, then they pull back up again! A good exit will land the plane. The landing does not need to be perfect; just put the wheels on the ground.

For example:

The Entrance

I’m sweaty because I’m in a long black robe and it’s May in Houston and someone should have known not to turn off the air conditioner at the Hilton downtown. I stand up for the Apostles Creed after the Bishop’s very long sermon and the next thing I know I’m being carried out of the ballroom by big guys in long black robes.

It’s my ordination as a United Methodist pastor and I just passed out.

The Exit

From my perspective, I see family, all these people who showed up for me, who had my back, and I have their back. Now I know why I came to Texas in the first place: to be part of this family. I guess it took me passing out at my own ordination for me to understand what church is all about. It's family.

Aside from my marriage and the birth of my children, it was the happiest moment of my life, because it's the moment I learned I'd never be alone, ever again.

My Entrance and Exit:

The Entrance

The Exit

The Stepping Stones

It's time to outline your story. The goal is to familiarize yourself with the outline, not memorize every word you write.

You may choose to write out your story word-for-word, but remember, you will not be able to read what you've written when you're telling your story. If you write out everything you want to say, you might find yourself getting lost when you're telling your story because you're not thinking about the story, you're thinking about what the next word is supposed to be.

It's important to distinguish between thinking about the *story* and thinking about the *words you wrote*. The story is happening in real-time: you're unfolding something in the present

moment and re-living the story as you tell it. But if you aim for precision of the words you wrote, you're not re-living the story in the present as much as you're trying to remember a piece of non-fiction you wrote in the past and recite it verbatim. Storytellers, and preachers, who try to recite a manuscript verbatim are mentally removing themselves from the present and time-travelling to the past. Their bodies are in the present, but their minds are in the past, scanning the words they wrote on a page. But storytelling, like preaching, happens in the present. Don't time travel. Stay with your audience.

Of course, that begs the question, "How am I supposed to learn my story without memorizing it?" *How to Tell the Story* uses the image of stepping stones.²⁸ In between the entrance and the exit is a path of stepping stones like rocks forming a pathway across a river. The storyteller needs to move from one side of the river, the entrance, to the other, the exit, and bring the congregation along with them. To do so requires planning out a series of stepping stones to guide us safely cross. Here's where thoughtful preparation is necessary to good storytelling. Even though memorization isn't required, the laying of stepping stones in advance of storytelling is required.

How to Tell a Story defines three kinds of stepping stones,²⁹ or three kinds of narrative that will move the storyteller from Entrance to Exit:

1. **Scenes** illustrate parts of the story that are compelling *and* critical to the arc. The climax of the story is almost always a scene.

2. **Summaries** move us through the timeline and connect us to the next step ("three weeks later," "after a lot of trial and error," "I completed my master's degree and was finally ready," "two kids and a mortgage later...").

3. **Reflections** share your feelings and insights about what you learned, concluded, deduced, decided to change, or accepted.

A scene is when you bring the storyteller into a specific situation. You slow down the story and provide rich detail. The goal is to create a world with your words. Unpack the emotions and colors and sights and smells – lay it on thick. Make the audience feel like they're in the situation with you. For example, don't tell us, "I was trying to find my dog in the rain." Say, I was running down the street, shoving, no, elbowing people out of the way. The rain was coming down in sheets, I could barely see. I kept shouting for my dog. I couldn't tell if the moisture on my face was rain or tears.

A summary is a transition. You're fast-forwarding through time and space to link scenes together. Summaries are important because they provide the necessary information the audience

²⁸ Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 72.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

needs to understand what's happening. Do not assume the audience understands how one scene connects to the next. Also, since every story involves something that happened to the storyteller and no one else, there will always be bits of context you need to supply so the congregation knows what you're talking about and why it matters. For example, "You need to know I live downtown in a crowded area where most people walk to work. The traffic is terrible in the morning. I always take my dog out on a leash. My worst fear is he'll be run over on the busy street just outside my front door. But it was raining so hard, the leash was slippery. He pulled hard and the leash slipped out."

A reflection is a window into your inner dialogue as you try to make sense of your story. Reflections are when you use spoken word to process what really happened to you, why it was so important, how it felt, why it was so joyful or painful. Reflections lay open the soul of the storyteller. For example, "I didn't need my ex-boyfriend after all. When my ex left, I got over him fast. But when I thought my dog was gone, I panicked. I needed him. The person I really needed all along was my dog – my wet, smelly, slippery dog. Who needs a guy when you have a dog?"

How do you know when to use a scene or a summary or a reflection? It's entirely up to you. It's all in how you want to tell the story. You can lay out the stepping stones any way you like as long as they take us across the river. But warning- don't leave us hanging midstream. Provide just enough summary and reflection for us to know what's going on in the story and why you care about it, because if you do not lay those stones for us, we will not know how to follow you to the exit.

Below, for the last time, is the example of my ordination service. I wrote this out by hand before I told this story at a MothSLAM in Houston. I did my best to memorize the Entrance and the Exit, though I admit I didn't nail them like I'd wanted. However, I was able to familiarize myself with the flow of the stepping stones. I knew when I was giving a summary, when I was thinking out loud in reflection, and when I wanted to drill down on a scene. I hadn't memorized the words; I had learned the direction. Preparing these stepping stones in advance allowed me to finish the story on time and know where I was going.

For Example:

After the Entrance...

- It's my ordination service. Ordination in the United Methodist Church is a long process. For me, it took seven years. That's seven years of seminary and interviews and really bad sermons. I had waited and worked for seven years for this moment, for the most important worship service of my life. [Summary]
- The Bishop's retirement dinner was the night before at the Hilton, and apparently they served bad pork because I got food poisoning. I was up all night worshipping the

porcelain goddess. I was dehydrated, severely dehydrated, almost lethally dehydrated.

[Summary]

- My friends told me there's no way I should go to the ordination service. I should stay in bed instead. But there's no way I'm missing my own ordination. I worked seven years for this and there's no way I'm missing it. **[Reflection]**
- There's another reason my ordination was so important to me. I had moved to Texas two years before. My wife's a pastor, too. She's from Texas, I'm from North Carolina. I knew no one when I came to Texas, no one except my wife. I had no friends, no family. That made the first few years of ministry hard. I was alone. I was lonely. I wondered if I'd made the right decision in coming here. Was this what God wanted? Did I choose poorly? Did I move across the country for bad pork? **[Reflection]**
- I'm in the ordination service. I make it through the Bishop's very long sermon. I stand for the Apostle's Creed. I make it through the part about Pontius Pilate, then the world starts spinning. Next thing I know, I'm being carried out of the service by two huge pastors in long black robes. They lay me on a bench in the Hilton lobby. I'm so hot and sweaty, I'm shaking. My hands are blue. I'm in shock. There are nurses in the audience and they try to cool me down. My father-in-law is there because my wife is supposed to be ordained, too. He can't get my robe off, so he pulls it over my head. I can hear the ordination service going on in the ballroom. My last name starts with H. They make it to the H's, and they skip over my name. **[Scene]**
- Someone calls 911. The paramedics show up. They lay me on a stretcher and roll me into a room. They hook me up to an EKG. **[Summary]**
- Suddenly, a bunch of people show up wearing long black robes, except for the tiny lady in the middle – the bishop. She's wearing white. The ordination service must have ended. The paramedics told me later - because they were just responding to a 911 call, they didn't know what they were showing up to – they thought this lady was coming to give me last rights. More people come into the room. They just keep coming. They're coming to support me, pray for me, tell me it's going to be okay. The bishop lays hands on me and ordains me right there on the stretcher. I still have the EKG printout from that moment. **[Scene]**

Move to the Exit

My Stepping Stones:

Questions:

1. What was this experience like for you? What was the hardest part? The most joyful part? What emotions came up as you remembered your story?

2. What was the most difficult part of your theological reflection? What is still unclear about theological reflection?

3. Now that you've mapped out your story, what about your faith is more clear to you? What "Ah ha!" moments are you having about faith? What are you understanding about God and your faith journey *because* you translated your story into words?

Band Practice

It's almost time to tell your Faith Story, but before you go public, you need to rehearse. It's time for band practice.

No, not the guitar and drums kind of "band." We're going for the small group kind of "band" in the Wesleyan tradition. Let's review bands.

Wesleyan Bands

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, believed faith formation happened in communities of small groups where friends gathered regularly, ideally several times a week, for prayer, accountability, encouragement, and wrestling with their faith. Today, we'd call these kinds of groups "small groups" or "Sunday School classes," but small groups and Sunday School simply didn't exist before Wesley's day in the 18th century. Of course, small communities of Christians have gathered together ever since Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:20). But it was the Methodist movement that made the concept of small groups as an organized discipleship strategy mainstream.

As a master community organizer himself, Wesley organized the members of the Methodist movement into small communities called "bands." A band looked much like a small group or small Sunday School class today. According to Methodism scholar Richard Heitzenrater, bands were "small groups of five to ten persons who voluntarily banded together for intense spiritual nature and support. Their primary activities were confession and prayer; their goal was spiritual growth."³⁰ Bands met at least once a week for "intense spiritual intercourse."³¹ The conversations at band meetings sounded like the discussions at AA and 12-step groups today. Band members would tell stories of the sins they were struggling with, reflect on their struggles, worries, and victories from the week, and ask the group to support and pray for them as they continued on the journey of personal growth.

The best small groups and Sunday School classes in church have this quality of "intense spiritual intercourse." The gathering is more than the content of Bible study or a curriculum; it's a company of friends building one another up, lifting up and responding to questions, praying together, and challenging one another. As United Methodist pastor Adam Hamilton writes, small groups, which are the modern equivalent of bands, are "an essential part of Christian community, accountability, and deeper growth in the Christian life."³²

³⁰ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995). 104.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

³² Adam Hamilton, *Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014). 93.

So, what do bands have to do with telling your Faith Story? First, you need to practice your story in front of a small group before you take it public. Second, you need people who will give you feedback – honest, clear, constructive, and encouraging feedback. Third, you need people who help you think theologically, asking questions like, “I wonder how this Scripture intersects with your story?” or “Did you realize your story is really about coming home to God’s love?” Rehearsal, feedback, and thinking theologically – not just any team of people can fulfill those tasks. For these, you need a band.

So, who’s in your band? Let’s aim for at least three people. These people may already be in your small group or Sunday School class. Or, they might be friends at church. Or family members. Whoever it is, they need to check off the boxes of the band member job description:

- Can I rehearse my Faith Story on this person?
- Will this person give me good feedback?
- Will this person help me think theologically about my story?

The most time-efficient way to practice your Faith Story is to get the band together all at once and rehearse in front of a group. If you can do it, go for it! However, you may not be ready for that, or the members of your band may not be able to come to the same place at the same time. That’s okay. Hop on a phone call. Schedule a video chat. Invite them to your house.

Here are a few questions for your band member to ask you after you rehearse your story. Below the questions are tips to keep in mind as you prepare to rehearse your story.

1. What is the One Sentence summary of this story? How does that match with what the storyteller says is the One Sentence summary?
2. How did the storyteller change from the beginning of the story to the end?
3. What are the stakes of the story? Why does the storyteller care about this story? What’s so important about it?
4. What was the “inciting incident,” the moment that kicked off the action?
5. Was there enough context to understand what the storytelling was going through?
6. Was the entrance clear?
7. Did the storyteller stick the landing?
8. Did the storyteller describe the scenes in the story with clarity and richness?

9. How long did the story run? What could be cut to make it shorter? Or where does the story need more detail?

10. What did you love the most about the story? Where were you hungry for more?

Tips for the Storyteller

- **Drink water before telling your story!** Nothing ruins a good story like dry mouth. Hydrate in advance of telling your story. Consider carrying a glass or bottle of water with you when you approach the microphone. If you feel your mouth drying out while you're in the middle of telling your story – gasp! - pause the story, take a sip of water, and pick up where you left off.
- **Use “I” language, not “you” or “they.”** You know how public speakers can use the word “you” to refer to a generic person? (The previous sentence just did that.) But your story isn't about a “you” or a “they.” It's about the person telling the story. Don't say, “We're walking through the desert and you can feel the heat coming up from the sand.” Say, “I'm walking through the desert with my friends, and I can feel the heat coming from the sand.” The latter is more personal. There's no gap between the story and the storyteller. Using “you,” “they,” or even “we” can distance the storyteller from the story and the congregation. It's a defense mechanism. But there's nothing to be afraid of. Be brave and use the “I.”
- **Feel free to use present and past tense.** You might start your story in the past tense. “I was walking down a long, dark alley. There were no streetlights. Suddenly, I heard a noise and the hair on my neck stood up.” But then, you switch to the present tense. “I'm running down the alley. I knock over trash cans. I can't catch my breath. Then I see it – it's just a cat.” Switching between past and present tense doesn't make for good writing, but remember, storytelling is a telling activity, not a writing activity, and telling allows for free movement between the past and present.
- **Only you will know where you make a mistake.** You are the keeper of your story. No one else knows your story better than you. Therefore, if you skip a stepping stone in your story, or if you lose your place, no one has to know. Even the people with whom you rehearsed your story won't know, and because they're cheering you on, they won't care. Do not fret over telling the story *exactly* the way you rehearsed it. If (and when) you lose your place, pause for a second or two, take a deep breath, collect your thoughts, and open your mouth to speak. You might skip a step, and that's okay. The pause might trigger a new flash of memory, and now you're telling a fresh bit of story you didn't intend to tell, but it's so compelling, you're surprised you didn't think of it before. Forgetting your place happens. Don't panic. Take a breath and keep going.

- **Leave out the fancy and the profane.** There is no need for fancy language in storytelling. You're not writing for the *New York Times*. You're telling a story about God. Keep the language plain. Also, profanity can distract people from the story. They'll remember the curse word, not the rest of your words. Sure, there's a time and place for profanity, like the time your grandmother, who never cursed, stubbed her toe and shouted a curse word so loudly, people dropped their forks at Thanksgiving Dinner. But that's different from carelessly and randomly dropping curse words throughout the story. It's distracting.
- **Avoid filler words.**³³ In casual conversation, we'll drop phrases like "You know?", "So..." and "You see...?" Well, the audience doesn't know. Starting with "So..." is a way to stall for time. And no, the audience doesn't see what you're seeing.
- **Practice standing up.**³⁴ Your body will carry the memory of the story. If you practice the story sitting down, your body will remember you telling the story sitting down. Then, when you stand in front of the congregation, your memory of the story will be a little fuzzier because you have no record of telling this story standing up. Rehearse for showtime. Stand up.
- **Silence can be as powerful as words.** You don't need to fill every second of speaking time with words. A well-placed moment of silence can say more than any word could. When I told my story at the The Moth, I paused after I said, "I could hear them ordaining people. They got to my name and skipped right over it." *Silence*. The silence allowed the audience to soak in the gravity of that moment.
- **Practice without a net.**³⁵ You'll have prepared some form of written notes, typed or old-school written by hand. But you won't be able to take those notes with you to the microphone. Like a tightrope walker at the circus, you have to attempt this death-defying feat eventually, so it's best to make your first attempt *before* you tell your story publicly. Rehearse your story at least once without your notes.
- **Make the stakes clear!** If the story starts to feel like it's falling flat, it might be because the stakes aren't clear to you, or you didn't make them clear in your telling. Feel free to say, "This was important to me because..." or "Here's what you need to understand..." Clear stakes make for compelling storytelling.

³³ Bowles, Burns, and Hixson. *How To Tell a Story*. 219.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

- **Practice the Entrance and the Exit on their own.** I wish I had done this before I told a story at The Moth. The entrance wasn't as crisp as it should have been, and the ending didn't pack the punch I wanted. I wish I had practiced the entrance, then skipped all the way to the end and practiced the exit. Rehearse those two in isolation from the rest of your story so that your takeoff and landing sound exactly like you wanted.
- **Listen for the parts that don't feel authentic.**³⁶ The people you rehearse on can tell you when the story starts to feel performed or produced, not told from the heart.
- **Don't apologize for your emotions.** You suddenly feel the urge to cry as you're telling your story, but that didn't happen when you were rehearsing. It's okay, let the tears come. Take a breath, and get back to the story. *Don't* say sorry for your emotions. God is in the tears, too. There is no need to apologize.

Questions:

1. What was it like rehearsing your Faith Story? What were the emotions? What will you try different next time?
2. What was it like listening to a Faith Story? How did someone else's Faith Story intersect with your own Faith Story? As you listened, what questions or "Ah ha!" moments were sparked about your own faith story?
3. How did telling your Faith Story out loud in public help you understand your faith better? What is more clear about your faith now that you've put your faith to language?

³⁶ Ibid., 214.