



Study Guide 5: **STORY OF SELF AND OTHERS**

Making room to hear others' stories is an act of hospitality in which Christ is present.

Introduction

We are our stories. Who we are cannot be summarized by facts about us, but is a complicated mess of our stories and the stories of others whose lives intersect with ours. To know me is to know my story.

Have a group member (or group leader) give a physical description (height, build, gender, hair color, etc) of him/herself to the group.

- From this description, do you *know* this person?
(Being able to recognize someone is different from knowing someone.)

Have the same person tell a short story about him/herself, something that will reveal some aspect of your character or personality.

- Now – do you *know* this person?
(Of course the answer is, maybe a little bit.)

The more stories you know the more you come to know another person. Sharing stories is one of the most important ways we have of demonstrating love for our neighbors.

Know the Story

Read Luke 10:25-37 (*The Parable of the Good Samaritan*)

American hearers of this story often presume the moral of this story is to be like the Good Samaritan. We know this story – Jesus wants us to be kind to those who are injured or poor or in need. We like this story, especially when we think it is about us. But such a presumption assumes a level of privilege and power that not everyone has. Let's take a moment and imagine the story from non-dominant perspectives, who have no privilege or power.

- Imagine you are the injured man. How might you tell the story the next day?
- Imagine you are the innkeeper. You are asked to care for another with a promise for payment – a promise you may not be inclined to trust. How might you tell the story the next day?
- From those perspectives, what is important in this parable?
- How hard/easy is it to imagine the other person's story?
- What would be most helpful?

As important a skill as imaginative empathy is, seriously engaging another person's story requires listening, giving them the space to share their story and receiving it as a gift.

Be the Story

Genesis gives an account of three visitors announcing to Abraham and Sarah that she will bear a child. This is a story of hospitality, of Abraham and Sarah providing a meal and a place of respite for strangers, for travelers. Of course, we learn that these aren't just any visitors; this is, indeed, a divine visitation. In providing hospitality to their visitors – in breaking bread together

and in listening to their story – Abraham and Sarah provided hospitality not merely to strangers but to God.

Hospitality is all about making room for the other, making a space which is not merely safe, but comfortable, home-like. Creating space for listening to another's story is at the heart of the question of hospitality. In making space for someone's story we are not merely making space for someone's body, but for their very selves. The hospitality we extend to others in listening to their stories is one of the ways we participate in God's ultimate act of hospitality in which all of our stories are being woven together in God's story.

- How do we provide hospitality to God by making space and listening to the stories of others?
- How have you experienced the presence of God by sharing your story with another, or by listening to the story of another?

Tell the Story

To share your story is to share yourself; to receive a story is to receive another. Stories provide us with a new lens with which to see the world around us. Stories bind us to one another, and invite us to walk in the shoes of diverse people whose experiences may be vastly different from ours. These stories help us see not merely what is but what can/could/might be.

Developing the skills necessary to become a people who are open to the stories of the other – whether that other is religious, social, racial, gender, etc. – is a faith practice, a practice in which we both give the gift of ourselves and receive the gift of the other. When I open myself to listen, really listen, to the story of another, I risk being radically changed, of seeing the world in radically new ways.

- In pairs, share a story from your childhood or a story about celebrating a birthday, a holiday or other meaningful occasion. How does this story (and the memory of it) shape the person you are today? Using tips from the Engaged Listening handout, the listener actively listens as the partner shares his/her story. After a few minutes, switch roles.
- After both have had the opportunity to share and listen, discuss in the large group - not the stories themselves, but the experience of sharing stories with another.
- How does sharing our stories and truly listening to another's story create community?
- How is sharing/listening to stories a way of loving our neighbor?

Closing Prayer

Lord, help us to make room in our lives to hear the stories of others. Make your love present as we listen and share. Amen.

(Adapted from the PD2015 Session, "Story of Self and Others" by Mindy Makant, Lenoir-Rhyne University. For complete curriculum, visit www.elcaymnet.org/PD2015.)

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