

The Studio

EPISODE // WRITING STORIES FOR WORSHIP

I love good stories! Recently, I discovered story-telling festivals where professional story-tellers move from stage to stage to tell stories. These stories might be funny, they might be tragic, they might be provocative, they might be full of hope. But, the one thing they have in common is that they are all mesmerizing!

I think my love for stories began around the family dinner table, where family members would gather to tell stories following a meal. It also could have come from a Sunday night routine in my home church, where church members gathered together to tell stories. We called these testimonies, but they were really nothing more than church members sharing about the way that God is working in their life. It was through those testimonies that I began to learn more about myself; it was through those testimonies and I actually began to learn things like life is really more important than that things like goodness is stronger than evil, that people really can change with God's help, and that God really is worthy and deserving of all of our thanks and praise.

I'm now convinced the stories are one of the most parts of the Christian life. I'm also convinced that each of us has a story to share, and so my question for you is: what is your story? How is God working in your life? How is God working in your family and your friends' lives? How is God working in the world around you, and how might you be prepared to share those stories when the time comes for you to do so?

Let me give you a few practical tips for sharing your story. These are some things that I have learned as I have practiced sharing my own story.

- ✦ **Know that you have a story to share.** Sharing your own story is really all about speaking truthfully about those things you have experienced and what you have seen and what you have lived through, and how those things have affected you. Be confident in that story and be willing to share it with the community around you.
- ✦ **Be honest when you share your story.** Your job is to communicate the truth. It's almost like you were standing up as a witness in the courtroom: where your job is to present the truth, to present the facts, just as they are and trust others to hear them and interpret them as they will.
- ✦ **Be vulnerable when you share your story.** When we're vulnerable, we're actually leaning more into the truth and when we're leaning into the truth, we're actually speaking against lies and falsehood. At the heart of all good stories is the desire for people to find truth, for people to find goodness, and for people to find beauty about themselves and the world around them. Vulnerability and honesty accomplish that. Just be sure that the content you decide to share is appropriate for all ages who are gathered in the room.
- ✦ **Let others interpret your story for themselves.** Don't feel compelled to stop and explain your story. It's sort of like telling a joke; if you have to explain a joke, then it's not funny anymore. The same is true with stories. If you tell your story and have to explain it, it actually loses its meaning. So, let others interpret your story for themselves.

- ✦ **Also, remember that storytelling is an art.** It's something you need to prepare and practice. The better you know your story, the better you've reflected on your story, the more equipped you're going to be to share that story whether that's impromptu or whether that's in a planned moment.
- ✦ **Be explicit about how God fits into your story.** This is a point of story-telling that none of us can afford to miss. No matter how clean or how messy our lives are, we always have to situate them within the context of what God is doing in and through us. One writer that I like calls this "God-speech." In other words, when we situate our story within the context of God's stories, we're turning everyday, ordinary speech into something that is real and that has meaning. We're reminding ourselves that all of us are participating in and living in God's story which is ultimately the Gospel. The Gospel is all about reminding ourselves and others that God is still about the business of saving and restoring this broken world in which we all live. And this, I think, is a pretty good place to be.