

Telling Your Story

What do these people have in common?

Rick Astley, Chris Kamara, Lisa Marie Presley, Floella Benjamin, Billy Graham, Michael McIntyre, Rob Burrow, Bob Mortimer, Elton John, Desmond Tutu.

What do they all have in common? They have written or been helped to write their biographies.

Have you read any biographies? Why is it that reading about other people's lives is so fascinating?

They have told the story of their lives, obviously highlighting significant life-changing moments and the impact they had on their lives. People love to hear about others' lives, which is why such books are often bestsellers.

If you were to write a biography, what would you want to highlight?

Births, marriages, bereavements, children, jobs, holidays, the ups and downs of life...

It's all about telling the stories.

We are not only impacted by biographies but by stories. They impact us in different ways.

Can you think of a story you have read or had read to you, or seen as a film that has impacted you? For the moment, let's omit the Bible and religious films.

Stories are a part of life; they explain things, they question things, and they give meaning and purpose.

The world is full of stories, not only of people's lives and experiences, but of nations. **Big** stories that shape not only individual lives but also the direction of nations. These narratives claim to explain something wider and completely beyond the smaller individual stories.

As Christians, our lives are shaped by the Christian faith of which we are part.

The **big** story for us as Christians is that of **his story**, the life of Jesus, which has and continues to change our lives.

Within the **big story**, there are lots of **little** stories of how the **big** story has impacted our lives. People who are often suspicious of the **big story** will be open to listening

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to the stories we have to tell of how God still impacts the world today and how he has touched our lives.

We encounter this story in the Bible. The story of our creator God who in love for his fallen creation makes a way possible to redeem his creation. He becomes one of us to bring us back to himself through his only son Jesus, who lives and dies, yet rises again from the dead. That same Jesus lives in us by his Spirit, day by day.

Our beliefs are summarised in the creeds, but our journey of faith is different for us all, just as it was for the disciples and followers of Jesus. All had an encounter with Jesus or a revelation from God that changed their lives.

Do you have a favourite Bible story? Why do you like that story?

There are many stories of encounters with Jesus that we could look at, such as the call of Peter, Matthew, and other disciples. The woman at the well, Nicodemus, who comes by night, and so many more. But let's concentrate on someone who recounted his story a few times to those who would listen, St Paul.

Let's look at the story of St Paul, or should we say Saul. The account we have in Acts 9:1-19 tells of his encounter with the risen and ascended Jesus on the road to Damascus and what followed.

Saul's name is changed to Paul, and when he has the opportunity, he not only tells the story of Jesus and what it means for those to whom he is speaking, but he also recounts his own story, his own meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

In Acts 21:37-22:21, he recounts his story to the crowd before him.

In Acts 24:10-23, he recounts his story before Felix the Governor.

In Acts 25:23-26:32 He recounts his story before King Agrippa

Read the story in Acts 9 and then one or all the accounts mentioned.

What springs out from Paul's retelling of his story?

The story of Paul's meeting with Jesus not only changed his life but also had an impact on others too.

Your story can do the same, whether you have had an encounter like Paul's or not; each encounter will speak of God's love for you and how that has impacted your life.

Earlier, we mentioned biographies. If you were to write your biography, where would you find God in your story, where does God's story interact with yours?

How would you begin? What would you want people to know?

The following is given to help you tell your story.

For some people, like Paul, there is a clear moment when they encountered Jesus and a clear change in their lives.

For others, an encounter with Jesus has been a revelation throughout their life, even from childhood.

Whatever we say, don't forget to mention Jesus!

Here is one way of helping you to formulate your story, which, for obvious reasons, is described as BEN and ANN, which is a simple way of outlining your faith story.

BEN

Before: Life before I met Jesus.

Encounter: How the encounter occurred.

Now: How has your life been changed by that encounter?

ANN

Always known: You cannot define a clear encounter, maybe brought up in a Christian household.

Need: To own/acknowledge the personal relationship with Jesus for yourself. (A little like a long engagement which at some point turns into a marriage.)

Now: How Jesus has and does guide your life day by day.

Using the outline above, write down a few notes or maybe record a few thoughts on your phone or even draw the things you want to say. See how it opens memories and maybe even a few surprises along the way, showing where and how God has and continues to work within your life day by day.

If you have the opportunity, share your story with someone in church first. If you are in a group situation, maybe partner with someone and share your story. Try to keep it to about five minutes each.

Pray for one another with thanksgiving for how God has been and still is at work in your lives.

Now you have your story clear in your mind, and remember it's an evolving story, God is still at work in your life, pray that you will recognise when it may be appropriate to share your story. Maybe something will come up over coffee with a friend, they might ask where you were on Sunday. If you were at church, you could mention it and see where it leads. Let it be natural and God-led, and don't underestimate how God's Spirit will speak through you.

It might be appropriate for a story-sharing moment in a church service or mission event. There will be opportunities, as scripture says;

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to answer everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV- UK)