



St. John's Wimborne  
New Life, Full Life

# Sharing your story



## Home Growth Group Notes Summer 2024

[www.stjohnswimborne.org.uk/sharingyourstory](http://www.stjohnswimborne.org.uk/sharingyourstory)

# Sharing your story

1. Witness (intro)
2. Love
3. Hope
4. Truth
5. Justice
6. Trust



The aim of these sessions is to give you confidence to share your faith through 5 personal stories. In October 2024 we will have a series of events at St John's that we can all invite our friends and families to. But alongside this we want the whole church family to feel able to talk about Jesus in their everyday life.

The first study is an introduction that will help us to think about witness - how to overcome the awkwardness we feel, and the importance of sharing our personal story. The next 5 sessions cover 5 topics that connect with everyone.

## **Scenarios**

We need to listen well before we can speak so there'll be some scenarios to reflect on that are based on real life situations. Asking a good question can help to open up a conversation.

## **Bible passages**

We talk about what we're excited about, so each session will look at Bible passages that show how Jesus fulfils the longings of our hearts. There'll be two passages each time which will enable us to think deeper about the riches of our Christian faith, and so how it connects to those around us.

## **Sharing our story**

For each theme, we'll be encouraged to think of a personal story about our faith that connects. Sharing it in your small group will hopefully be not too scary, and give you confidence to share it more widely. You could use the fingers of your hand to help remember the five themes and the story for each one.

## **Praying for opportunities**

Each session will have a time for prayer, where we can pray for each other to have the courage to share our story with others. There might be particular people that you want to pray for opportunities to talk to about the theme.

# I. Witness

## Sharing your story

Share in pairs (or with the whole group) about something interesting that has happened to you in the last week (not faith related).

There are lots of things that we find it easy to talk about, but for many of us, our faith is not one of them.

## Read 1 Peter 3:15

*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

What puts you off talking about your faith?

How does this verse help?

## Read Acts 26:1-29

What do you notice about how Paul shares his faith?

How does Paul put 1 Peter 3:15 into practise?

Paul is arrested for causing an uproar (Acts 24:5). But what does he focus on in his "defence"?

How does Paul connect his story with King Agrippa?

How does Paul deal with Festus' interruption?

(See [extra notes](#) for more help)

## Praying for opportunities

Over the next studies, we will consider 5 aspects of our faith and think of personal stories that relate to them. Let's pray that God would enable us to share these stories with those around us.

Who would you like to share your faith with?

## Extra notes on Acts 26

(From the Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary)

26:4–18 In keeping with his earlier account of his encounter with the risen Lord in Acts 22, Paul goes straight to the heart of the issue: the authority and claims of the risen Lord Jesus. In keeping with the charges against him, Paul highlights again his Jewish heritage (as in Acts 22), especially his prior zeal as a Pharisee (cf. 22:3) and his “raging fury” in his opposition to “the name of Jesus of Nazareth,” expressed in his persecution of the saints (26:9–11). He too was obsessed with the death of those who belonged to Jesus (implying that more believers than Stephen were killed; cf. 9:1). As he did in his defense in Acts 24, however, Paul signals early on that the core issue at hand is the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of the dead is the hope of all Israel. Indeed, given their knowledge of the God of the Bible, “Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?” (26:8). This is going to be the climax that he is working toward (26:22–23).

26:24–32 The interruption by Festus (probably at the reference to the resurrection of Jesus) enables Paul to clarify that what he is saying (1) is “true and rational,” (2) is public and verifiable knowledge, (3) is the message of the prophets, and (4) requires a response of belief. So, apart from being in chains, Paul considers his position before God to be desirable for king and courtier alike. Paul turns from defense to bold appeal to all those listening, such is the significance of the risen Lord Jesus. The final statements from all those in power once again assert Paul’s innocence (see above on 25:25).

# 2. Love

## Scenarios

1. You go for a drink to catch up with Alan, and you find out that he has just started going out with a woman he met online. He's so excited to tell you all about her and the exciting dates he has planned. You know Alan has been looking for a relationship for a while, and it is lovely to see him so happy.

2. Belinda does not look happy when you pass her in the street. You ask her if she's alright, and she stops and clearly wants to chat. You find out that her daughter's family are moving to New Zealand, including Belinda's only two grandchildren.

What questions might you ask to take the conversation deeper?

## Read Luke 15:11-24

Why are people lost without God?

How does God feel about lost people?

How does this story motivate us to share our faith?

## Read Romans 5:5-8

How does someone come to know God's love?

- What do they need to understand?

- What do they need to experience?

(See [extra notes](#) for more help)

## Sharing our story

What story could you share about knowing God's love?

- How did you come to understand God's love at the cross?
- How have you experienced the Holy Spirit pouring God's love into your heart?
- Has someone showed you a great example of Christ-like love?

## Praying for opportunities

Is there anyone in your life that particularly needs to know God's love?

## Extra notes on Romans 5

(From the Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary)

In verse 5, Paul explains that this hope in which we rejoice is formed in us through sufferings. Although the long journey from sufferings to hope can be heartbreaking and arduous, the justified should never be disappointed, because the love of God has been poured into their hearts and remains theirs through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. For the Romans, who undoubtedly faced trials as a direct result of following Jesus, Paul is reminding them that enduring as followers of the true Lord of the world will lead to their ultimate vindication.

In 5:6, Paul elaborates on what an amazing work God did to establish a people for himself. He begins by explaining that Christ died for the justified not because they had made themselves strong or because they possessed appealing characteristics. Rather, he died at just the right time in God's providence while they were still weak (cf. Gal 4:4–7). This reality should stun both Paul's readers and today's readers because people will rarely lay down their lives even for other good people; it just does not happen. But God's love is of a completely different sort than ours. God placed his own love in a striking point of view in that "while we were still sinners, Christ died in our behalf."

# 3. Hope

## Scenarios

1. Candice lives next door to you, and you know that she has been having treatment for cancer. When you ask her how it is going, she tells you that the doctors are saying encouraging things, but that she can't see that she'll ever get back to how she was. She shakes her head and says that there doesn't seem much point in life anymore.

2. Your colleague, Dalton, is chatting to you about his retirement plans. He is going to be able to take early retirement in a couple of years and is hoping to play a lot of golf and learn watercolour painting. His one concern is having to spend time looking after his elderly mother, who he views as a bit of an inconvenience.

What question might you ask to take the conversation further?

## Read Mark 5:21-43

What are the differences between Jairus and the woman?

What does the woman need to realise about Jesus and her suffering?

What does Jairus need to realise about Jesus and his suffering?

(See [extra notes](#) for more help)

## Read Romans 8:28-39

What comfort does this passage give us in our sufferings?

How can we know that God loves us if our circumstances seem to suggest otherwise?

## Sharing your story

What story could you share about how God has given you hope in the midst of suffering?

## Praying for opportunities

Who would you like to share a message of hope with?

## Extra notes on Mark 5

(From the Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary)

These two miracles represent the second of Mark's intercalations, where one episode is "sandwiched" in the middle of another (cf. 3:20–35). There are several interesting parallels between the two episodes. We have already noted the key theme of faith, which results in restoration in both cases. Second, Jesus addresses the woman with the bleeding disorder as "daughter"—the only time he addresses someone this way in Mark's Gospel. And the girl of course is a daughter to Jairus. The woman has been suffering for 12 years; and the little girl is 12 years old. Finally, the woman's disorder would result in ceremonial defilement. In the same way, touching a dead body would normally bring defilement. But in each case Jesus brings purity to defilement.

This theme of defilement is important in this whole section of Mark's Gospel: the previous episode was full of symbols of defilement: impure spirits, the tombs of dead bodies, the unclean pigs. In chapter 7 Jesus will address the issue of ceremonial defilement. The point is that with the coming of the kingdom, Jesus reverses the results of defilement and brings purity and healing to a fallen creation.

# 4. Truth

## Scenarios

1. You enjoy chatting about the news whenever you see Evan. He is concerned about AI and what effect it will have on society, and mentions some recent examples of fake pictures on the internet. He finishes by saying "you just can't believe anything you hear these days."
2. You have recently met Francesca, and when she asks you what you did at the weekend, you tell her that you went to church. She tells you that she went to church as a child, and enjoyed Sunday School, but that she stopped believing because of science.

What question might you ask to take the conversation deeper?

## Read **John 20:24-31**

Why is it encouraging to read about "doubting" Thomas?

- Why does Thomas have doubts?
- How does Jesus deal with Thomas doubts?

How can people believe today without physically seeing Jesus?

## Read **2 Peter 1:16-21**

Why can we be confident about what the Bible says about Jesus?

- What does Peter stress about his own testimony?
- How do the Old Testament prophecies support this?

(See [extra notes](#) for more help)

## Sharing your story

What story could you share about how you came to see that Christianity was true?

- Is there a bit of evidence that you find persuasive?
- Is there a question you had that was answered?

## Praying for opportunities

Who would you like to be able to talk to about the evidence for the Christian faith?

## Extra notes on 2 Peter I

(From the Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary)

Peter begins the main body of the letter by establishing the truthfulness of the gospel, confirmed by the testimony of two witnesses: (1) his own experience as an apostle (vv. 16–18), and (2) the OT (vv. 19–21).

1:16–18 In contrast to cleverly devised myths, Peter asserts that when he and his fellow apostles preach and teach about Jesus Christ, they do so as eyewitnesses; therefore, their testimony about Jesus is reliable, compelling, and truthful. Among the many events he could have recounted, Peter chooses Jesus's transfiguration, where Jesus received honour and glory from God the Father (cf. Ps 8:5), whom Peter refers to as "the Majestic Glory."

1:19–21 The gospel message rests not only on the apostles' testimony but also on the OT. What Peter experienced on the mountain with Jesus fulfilled OT promises. Because God's Word is reliable, believers should heed it as the only source of light in the midst of a dark world (cf. Ps 19:8; 119:105, 130). This attentive posture towards God's Word must continue until the true and fuller light arrives at Christ's return. This hope is grounded in the truth that no prophecy comes from human imagination but from God by the power of the Spirit, who carried men along like a wind filling the sails of a boat.

# 5. Justice

## Scenarios

1. Geraldine is telling you about her latest letter to her MP and his response - which she describes as "woefully inadequate". She is often angry about the inequalities in our world, and likes to vent her frustration to you.
2. Your colleague Hamza doesn't have a happy life - things always seem to go wrong for him and has been badly treated in the past. He tells you that he has been blamed for something at work that wasn't his fault, and now he's worried that he might be sacked.

What question might you ask to take the conversation further?

## Read Matthew 12:9-21

Why is Jesus' definition of justice different from the Pharisees?

How does Jesus fulfil this prophecy of Isaiah?

Why is Jesus bringing justice both an encouragement and a challenge?

(See [extra notes](#) for more help)

## Read I Peter 2:18-25

How can Christians cope with the injustice we experience in this world?

- In what ways is Jesus an example to us?
- In what way is his death more than just an example? Why should Christians be able to forgive in a way that others can't?

## Sharing your story

What story could you share about trusting God's justice?

- Is there an injustice in the world that you feel particularly passionate about?
- Is there a wrong that Jesus has enabled you to forgive?
- Is there a situation where you have had to acknowledge that you need forgiveness?

## Praying for opportunities

Who would you like to be able to talk to about trusting God's justice?

## Extra notes on Matthew 12

(From the Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary)

12:9–14 This man's condition was not life-threatening. Jesus could have waited to heal him privately after the service. Jesus deliberately provokes the Pharisees. They respond to his incredible act of authority (he only speaks!) and mercy with outrage: "But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him" (12:14). Their response is outrageous and unmerciful, for the only "work" that Jesus did on the Sabbath was to speak four words.

12:15–21 Jesus's actions remind Matthew of what was penned in Isaiah 42:1–4, 9. This is the longest Old Testament quotation in Matthew, and it serves as an excellent summary of Matthew's theology. Jesus is the Suffering Servant, yet the Father's "beloved" Son. The Holy Spirit, who descended upon Jesus at his baptism, helps him press on in his mission. That mission is not merely for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel", it is for the nations. Jesus came not as a political revolutionary ("He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets," 12:19), but to round up the utterly useless into his kingdom. The Servant will serve the marginalized. Those whose lives are like "a bruised reed" or a "smoldering wick," he will bring to life. He will bring "justice to victory." This son of King David rules in humility and for the humble. He brings rest and justice.

# 6. Trust

## Scenarios

1. During your lunch break, your colleague Igor comes over to have a moan about the Managing Director. The MD has been awarded another bonus, despite seeming to do very little and all the workforce have been given a below-inflation pay increase. Igor thinks the company would be better off without her.
2. Jasmine likes chatting with you about various issues in her life, but you know never to suggest that she should do things differently. Whenever religion comes up she says "That's fine for you, but I hate the idea of someone else telling me what I should do."

What question might you ask to take the conversation deeper?

## Read John 10:7-15

Why can we trust Jesus to give us life as we follow him?

- How is Jesus' leadership different to other leadership?
- How and why does Jesus seek to influence us?
- How can we know that Jesus truly cares about us?

## Read Romans 12:1-2

Why should following Jesus lead to a radical change?

- What is the motivation for giving our lives to God?
- How does change happen in the Christian life?

(See [online commentary](#) for more help)

## Sharing our story

What story could you share about trusting Jesus' leadership?

- Is there an example of bad leadership you've experienced that contrasts with Jesus?

- How did you decide to give your life to Jesus?

- Is there something you've found it difficult to trust Jesus with, but come to see that his way is best?

## Praying for opportunities

Who would you like to tell about the trustworthiness of Jesus?

## Extra notes on Romans 12

(From the Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary)

12:1–2 Paul connects the exhortation and instruction that follows to the main body of the letter by using “therefore” at the beginning of the verse. He has corrected how they are to think about what God has accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and now he will explain how their new thinking should lead to a different sort of living.

In 12:2, Paul makes both a negative and positive command to emphasize the change of thinking that must coincide with the Roman believers presenting their whole persons as living sacrifices. This change of mind must characterize their lives if they want to live out the callings that God has placed on their lives and love their neighbours as themselves (Rom 12–15).

If the Romans are not actively engaged in the process of being transformed by the renewing of their minds, they will be shaped by the thinking and actions that that Paul has sought to correct in the body of the letter. Embracing the truths that he has articulated will cause them to be transformed by the renewing of their minds in order that they might examine the will of God properly.



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