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Your Story Matters: Lesson 1 - Instructor Notes

- Who “story telling, memory work” is for
 - Not in crisis (see timeline work)
 - Safe
 - Advanced enough in healing not to be overwhelmed by the memories and process

1. Intro to Remember

Memory work

It’s now a couple hours past dinnertime. I’m hungry. I glance past Bob to my left and look toward the clock on the wall. 8:02. He thinks I’m looking at him. “Is there anything else you would add?” he asks. I hesitate, but then notice I’ve been drawn back into the conversation. I see Jeff and Chris lean in close just in case I have an answer.

We’ve just spent the past two hours going over our finances. And by “we” I mean Bob and the two smartly dressed financial planners sitting on the other side of my dining room table. Money bores me. But our budget is something Bob wants to keep on top of and he wants me to be aware. So I sit there and try to pay attention. But I’m hungry.

Chris had just presented everything we own and owe from an attractive blue leather binder, as if 30+ years of marriage (three kids, five houses, twelve—I think twelve—work changes between us) could ever be so neatly bound. I nudge Bob with my elbow and say, “Well, there’s that beach house I want...” and everyone laughs. Bob especially. He thinks I’m kidding, especially in light of Jeff’s earlier advice. “You don’t want to own beach property, it’s just not a wise investment.”

I never kid about a beach house.

“Seriously though,” I say, “there is something we need to discuss.” Everyone is suddenly all ears. “Well, I met with someone at the local Seminary today.” In an instant I feel my heart drop. I’m not sure I’m ready to voice what I’m going to say next. I mean, if I say it, it becomes real, right? Once spoken there’s a really good chance I’ll have to follow through. That’s my thinking. Especially if I speak it in front of witnesses! “I...” I hear my voice but don’t necessarily feel my vocal cords moving, “...RTS just started a counseling program and I think I’d like to take some courses.” I’m not



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sure if it's a good idea but I quickly glance over at Bob for his response. The expression on his face is priceless.

Bob is an amazing financier. I wouldn't have said that early in our marriage. Back then I'd have called him a Scrooge. Some of our worst fights the first year of marriage were over money. I didn't work, so when Bob got home each day, or if our weekend was free of family obligations, I wanted to go out and have fun.

Bob wanted to save money.

Renting property, car loans, paying interest, those were all unthinkable in our household. Bob believed a mortgage was ok but only if the goal was to pay off the loan early. Vehicles should be bought outright, keeping a credit card balance is anathema, and a budget should guide all our spending. I can't tell you how many times we refinanced (Chris could though, I'm sure). Don't get me wrong. I complained about it for sure. But in the long run Bob set us up well. We've recently begun to imagine what it would be like to go into some kind of ministry together when he retires.

The shocked expression on Bob's face quickly softened as he grinned at me from ear to ear. "We can talk about that later," he tells me, "I don't think we need to worry about it for this stage in the financial planning." But, I think we both intuitively knew there was no coincidence we just found out we could retire comfortably and that the local Seminary was now offering counseling courses.

Suddenly, we were knocking at the door of LIFE'S NEXT BIG STEP.

A Theology of Story - Remember

- **My task - discover what Scripture says about story work**
 - a. Does it?
 - b. The Bible DOES tell us in Ecc. 12:8 & 12 CSB

Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity...



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[and one of those vanities is] there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wearies the body.

c. But “the Teacher” (in vs 9-10) also tells us...

9 Besides being wise...[the teacher] taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and *arranging many proverbs*. 10 The Teacher *sought to find pleasing words*, and he *wrote words of truth plainly*.

d. Here, writing stories, doing story work can seemingly be a “negative”

e. Also important to remember this is not a prescriptive passage. If so, it would contradict

Ex. 17:14 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this as a remembrance in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua.”

f. Proof Texting interpretation about story work

g. Proof Texting is a *narrow* perspective, looking for what Scripture tells us *specifically* about writing our stories

h. What we want to do instead is to look broadly, by observing God in Scripture as He relates to mankind, rescues His people, orchestrates redemptive history, and prepares us a place with His Son in glory. Or, in other words,

i. Creation Fall Redemption Consummation



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- i. When we hear/or see / or discover information found in general revelation (i.e. secular psychology or methodology for our purposes), we may not discover a one-to-one correlation in Scripture, but we will find
 - i. Stories which affirm experience, like (2 Sam. 13:20)
“So Tamar lived as a desolate woman in the house of her brother Absalom”
Tamar went away “desolate,” a verb in this context meaning to be appalled, stunned, stupefied. These words signify that physical assault has an effect on the entire body (the brain IS the body as well) *and* the emotional workings of the brain.
 - ii. Metaphors that confirm the simultaneous workings in bodily functions (trauma), like (Psa. 16:7)
“I will praise the Lord who counsels me—even at night my conscience (kidneys, heart) instructs me.”
 - iii. Lessons that simulate the healing process (John 21:15-17)
“When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you **love** Me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to Him, “You know that I love You.” “**Feed** My lambs,” He told him. A second time He asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you **love** Me?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to Him, “You know that I love You.” “**Shepherd** My sheep,” He told him. He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you **love** Me?” Peter was



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grieved that He asked him the third time, “Do you love Me?” He said, “Lord, You know everything! You know that I love You.” “Feed My sheep,” Jesus said.

- iv. Notice Jesus is re narrating a memory/a story
- j. This is what provides a rich framework for how to help people with their problems.¹
 - i. So likewise a rich framework for how to biblically interpret “story work” (a practice that helps people mediate their problems)
- k. One such place we watch story work happen broadly is in

SCRIPTURE

- l. by observing God in Scripture as He relates to mankind, rescues His people, orchestrates redemptive history

“History is ‘His Story,’ the story of God moving among the peoples of His creation.”

Dr. Mike F. Ross

- **Stories are the primary way God chose to reveal himself**
 - a. The Bible is a story largely made up of narrative

¹ AMG “Truthish”



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Theology of Story

- Stories in Scripture illustrate what it looks like to love (see John passages above)
- Make it possible to obey God
 - Stories in Scripture tell of Christ's life, death, and resurrection tell us what we could not accomplish, what God did for us, which makes obedience possible
- Transform our inner man (2 Cor. 3:18)
 - We all with unveiled faces BEHOLD (watch—like a movie, consider, gaze upon)
- Scripture helps us see all of life through the lens of God's perspective
 - Stories in Scripture help us see life through the lens of God's perspective
- **Purpose of telling our stories** (again, same)
- Work out our salvation.
- Inform who we were,
- Inform who we are now, particularly in relationship to God.
- Generate faith in his promises,
- Help us to cherish God and His ways,
- Increase belief in God as we remember his faithfulness and care,
- Preserve a right mindedness,



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- Make it possible to “love” our brothers and sisters—even those who have caused us harm,² (sometimes the best way to love is to allow consequences to their actions, call out their sin, see “Bold Love.”)
- Reshape our inner man (as it connects us to the “big 6” emotions)
 - Sadness
 - Anger
 - Fear
 - Shame
 - Disgust
 - Despair
- Remembering our stories helps us see all of our life (circumstances) through the lens of God’s perspective.
- **NET**
 - a. Secular psychology noticed something
 - b. Narrative Exposure Therapy
 - c. In 2022, approximately 468 million children (18.8%, or more than 1 out of 6) were living in a conflict zone. ([Save the Children.org](https://www.savethechildren.org))

² This type of love is derived broadly from Scripture



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- d. Globally, it is estimated that up to 1 billion children aged 2–17 years, have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year. ([WHO](#), American Academy of Pediatrics)
- e. Approximately 300,000 children are believed to be combatants in some thirty conflicts worldwide. Nearly half a million additional children serve in armies not currently at war, such that 40 percent of the world's armed organizations have children in their ranks. ([Council on Foreign Relations](#))
- f. Children can become involved in armed conflicts in direct combat roles, but also in supporting roles – being forced or coerced to become cooks, cleaners, porters, intelligence gatherers and spies, wives, sex slaves, or used in acts of terror.

While many children are still forcibly recruited and used by armed forces or groups, research has found that socio-economic and circumstantial factors can push boys and girls into joining an armed group, left with no choice.

Our research found these coercive "push" factors are most often related to the sense of safety or need for protection perceived by a child and his or her family, extreme poverty, hunger, lack of access to education, and lack of hope for the future – particularly in protracted conflicts. ([World Vision](#))



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- g. When conflicts involving children end, experts say the prospects for a lasting peace are hurt by large populations of psychologically scarred, demobilized child soldiers. ([Council on Foreign Relations](#))
- h. Some of the most devastated and traumatized people in the world
- i. NET³ was developed for the treatment of PTSD resulting from organized violence
 - i. Patient repeatedly talks about most traumatic experience in detail
 - ii. Patient simultaneously re experiences all emotions associated with the event (saw heard, smelled, felt, the movements they recall, and how they thought at the time)
 - iii. Initially distressing, distress level diminishes over time

- *Stories exist in our memories.*

“Life is all memory except for the one present moment that goes by so quick you can hardly catch it going. It’s really all memory.” Tennessee Williams, *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, 1963

- a. Story work begins with memory work
- b. Remembering is the most oft repeated command in Scripture
 - i. 270 “remember” and variants; memorial, remind, recall
 - ii. 160ish “remember”

³ BMC Psychiatry Narrative Exposure Therapy as a treatment for child war survivors with PTSD



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- iii. Doesn't even include cognates such as "consider, learn, reminisce"
- c. In fact, much of Scripture was written from memory
- d. A memory, (memoir - could even be said of the Bible) tells us how we got here from there.
 - i. Side note - Importance of hearing/reading memoir in our helping others
 - 1. Memoir's (could also call "testimonies") are our richest resource for understanding mental health - how a person experiences the label
 - 2. "Our compassion grows as we listen to real stories of real people" Ed Welch, *BC and Outreach*, 387
 - 3. Adds to our experience
 - 4. Adds to our wisdom
 - 5. Encourages humility and carefulness
 - 6. Enhances our understanding of unique human experiences
 - 7. Challenges assumptions/presuppositions
 - 8. Improves our theology and application
 - 9. Teaches us to listen scripturally so we hear more than what the memoir intended (388)
 - 10. Deepens and strengthens relationships



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11. Teaches us to represent God relationally
 12. Diane Langberg, stories were her education
 13. Seminaries/higher education do not offer
 14. BC/pastoral care DEFINITELY doesn't offer
 15. "We want those who receive biblical/pastoral counsel...to find more love, deeper insight, and more extensive transformation than can be found..." anywhere else (389)
- e. Without memory, we would not be able to carry out basic functions of living, and learning would be impossible.
- i. Think about driving to familiar places, or what you habitually do on any given weekday (or weekend!)
- f. We do not have complete control over our memories. If you've had a trigger you know what I mean. Remembering often happens to us.
- g. Memory *is a mechanism* that receives information, encodes, sorts, stores and retrieves it
- h. Memories *are the events and experiences* that invisibly shape us.



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- i. Memories invisibly inform us how to interpret both relationships and new life experiences
 - i. Though not determinative

“With each new experience, or repetition of a previous one, the brain rewires itself...scientists call this neuroplasticity.” Richard Jerome

Memory is, “The holy vessel.” Rabbi Steve Leder

- j. Story work is actually MEMORY work (before we tell our stories)

- **Exercise:**

Putting together what this first part of the course taught us with what we’ll be learning in *The Other Half of Church*

- a. God moments (aka your happy place) –or– JOY moments

Joy also resides in the memory (also in the future!)



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- i. Picture a memory (an image) of a time when you felt joy and a deep connection to God.
- ii. Remember how you *felt* emotionally, spiritually, physically (an awareness in your body—tears, knot in your stomach, etc.—you may even feel it again in the memory).
- iii. What did you think God was telling you at the time (i.e. "you are loved," "I'm here..." These will be consistent with Scripture).
- iv. Give your God moment a short title.



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ESV Christmas

Safe to Hope Bonus Episode (AMG & Julia Jan. 23, 2024)

<http://tinyurl.com/musvmws9>

Felt:

Surprised

Loved

Cared for

I cried

Only God would have known how much that would mean to me

“I will take care of you”

Seaboards

annmareegoudzwaard.com “Delicious Despair” Part 1

<http://tinyurl.com/5as3a47c>

Felt:

Devastated

Bob’s care at a very difficult time in our marriage

God was *present*

“I see you”

- b. These can be used as foundations for your stories “vignettes”
 - i. Leslie, “Notice what God notices...” (21)
- **The Help[H]er**
 - a. Assuming you already are one or that you will be using what you have learned in this course to be one (not necessarily officially)
 - b. Imagine sitting with a suffering soul who wants to tell you their story
 - i. What will your posture be?
 - ii. What kinds of things will you say?
 - iii. What will you NOT say?
 - iv. How much will you interact with their story as they tell it?



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- v. If want to help them draw out,
 - 1. Accurate language
 - 2. Biblical language
 - 3. Truthful languageWhat will you be listening for?
- vi. What will you be careful about in your time together?
- vii. What will you do with anything in their story that challenges your presuppositions? Your theology?
- viii. How will you let their story broaden your application of the Bible?
- ix. What actions (inaction?) will you take to assure the storyteller they are known?
- x. How will you bless those who invite you to enter into their story?