

Weeks 1 & 2 Bulletin Inserts

Your Story

WEEK #1

Essential Element #1: COMMUNITY

Message Title: Worship Gatherings

Your Story is meant to **reveal** something to the world about the Father.

God wants every character in His story to be **connected** in community.

Three reasons why we gather to worship every week...

1. We gather around something **greater**.
2. We experience God **together** – Vertical exchange.
3. There is a **giving** and receiving – Horizontal exchange.

WEEK #2

Essential Element #1: COMMUNITY

Message Title: Groups

The Bible reveals that our commitment to **community** is a vital element in our stories.

Our best stories emerge from engaging in community through worship gatherings and **smaller groups**.

God uses the **influence of others** to help us all become better people.

Lasting mutual influence requires **connectedness**.

Will I partner with God to add new and significant **characters** into my story?

For the Leader:

This synopsis of the “Your Story” message series will help you understand where we’re going over the next seven weeks.

Your story is unique. No one else in the world has exactly your same story. God intends for the story of your life to be epic – to be the best that it can be for your good and to reveal something to the world about God. The Bible prescribes several elements that our stories should include: community, generosity, mission, and service. In the “Your Story” series, we will reveal these key elements and discover how we can partner with God through them in order to live an epic life.

Training Tips

- Instructions in italics are for the leader and may include suggested/sample answers to the questions.
- Start and conclude the group meetings on time (aim for 1 ½ hours). Everyone (especially your hosts) will appreciate this!
- Ask for volunteers to share or to read aloud; don’t put anyone on the spot. You may also ask people ahead of time if they will read aloud. (Just be certain to indicate that to the group: “I asked Mark to plan to read this passage of scripture tonight...”)
- As people arrive, have them complete a nametag (a supply of nametags and other resources may be found at the Information Desk in the Foyer)
- As the leader, it is your responsibility to manage the clock and keep your group on task.

Suggested Agenda for Groups

Your Story

WELCOME/SNACKS 15 minutes

- *Food is a tool for fellowship. Keep it simple!*

1ST-WEEK DISCUSSION ABOUT THE GROUP 5-10 minutes

(Perhaps as folks are finishing up their snacks.)

- *Discuss how the group will be managed (i.e. start/stop times, when we need to be out of the host's home, any "off-limits" areas and how the group will handle childcare options). Refer to the training materials for ideas on how to offer childcare in the group.*
- *Remind the group of CONFIDENTIALITY – what's said in the group remains in the group.*

OPEN (Ice Breakers) 10 minutes

- *Don't announce that you're going to do an ice breaker, just lead it.*
- *Model the length of answer that you want and invite the next person to share.*
- *If children are included in the ice breaking, encourage parents to help children think of their own answers and let the children answer for themselves if possible.*

(Choose the best one):

1. What is one of your favorite stories (recent or from childhood, maybe as told through a book or movie)? What is it about the story that makes it a favorite? (*Example: plot twists, setting, particular character, it's connections to you life, etc.*)
2. What words might you use to describe the "story of your life" and why? You could use genre terms such as epic, adventure, tragedy, action, romantic comedy, slapstick, etc. Be creative!
3. GROUP STORY: Beginning with the leader, everyone take a turn adding a sentence to create a unique group story. The leader can add his/her sentence following this first beginning sentence: "My friend Bill is one of those people that has the craziest experiences in life." Have fun and be surprised at the unexpected twists and turns the story takes.

DISCUSS - 35 minutes

You may wish to read aloud this introduction to the "Your Story" Message Series:

Our new message series is called "Your Story." God wants the story of our lives to be the best that they can be – for our good and to reveal how awesome God is to others around us. This series is intended to help us partner with God as He writes our best stories together.

- **Leader Tip:** *Be sure to keep your completed "Your Story" bulletin insert nearby each week. You may wish to refer to this occasionally. Sometimes groups take 3 minutes to go over it together to ensure everyone completed all the blanks or to "catch up" anyone who missed the message.*

Week 1 – Worship Gatherings

1. On Week 1, Pastor Brandon taught that God wants his followers to be connected with one another in *community*. As a group, discuss the biggest challenges/obstacles to being in community. (*Examples: busy schedules, surface relationships, fear of being "real" with others about our lives, introverts would rather be alone, etc.*)
2. Pastor Brandon said that we gather around something (and Someone) greater than ourselves during our large worship gatherings. Discuss how this has been (or hasn't been) your experience recently or in the past.
3. In what ways has participating with others in weekly worship gatherings helped you? (*Examples: gain better perspective on my challenges as I focus on an awesome God, the music lifts my spirits, the messages inspire me and apply to everyday life, being with other Christ followers encourages me, etc...*)

4. What are some practical ways that we can more actively engage in our weekly worship gatherings?
(Examples: Arrive with an attitude of expectancy, embrace the role of encouraging others, serve on a Sunday ministry team, praying for or with someone else, use your spiritual gift through the Gifts Microphone, aim to write down at least one action step for that week from every message, invite others who appear to be disconnected to lunch, etc.)

Week 2 - Groups

5. Tell us briefly about one person who had a strong positive influence in your spiritual life. What were the keys to that person's influence on you? *(Examples: Just being there, authenticity in their life, willingness to stick with you through good and bad, speaking truth in clear yet loving ways, etc.)*
6. What are the potential risks of connecting with others relationally in a group like ours? What are the potential benefits?
7. On Sunday, Pastor Dwayne said: "God uses the influence of others to help us all become better people." Can you share some imaginary examples of how that might happen in a group like ours?

GO DEEP – 10 minutes

1. What do you hope the story of your life reveals about God to the people closest to you?
2. If you could identify a great "next step" for you to take on your spiritual journey, what would it be for you? *(Examples: give up a habit, pray or read Bible on a more regular basis, be water baptized, forgive someone who hurt me, committing to serve on a team at church, more consistent attendance at worship gatherings, giving a percentage of my income to God on a regular basis, finding a mentor, etc.)*

How can our group help you move toward taking your next step?

Leader Tip: Responses to these questions may naturally lead into a time of prayer. Go with it!

PRAYER - 8 minutes

- *Indicate that each time the group meets we will want to spend time in prayer together. God has promised that if we call to him (prayer), He will answer us. This is not the time to give advice to others. It's a time to pray and encourage one another by carrying each other's burdens to the Lord.*
 - *Encourage your group to always start with needs within group members and their own households before discussing "Aunt Trudy's gout".*
 - *Perhaps someone in your group would be willing to keep a prayer journal for the group – capturing needs & answers to prayer throughout the series.*
 - *Explain to the group that one person should pray for one of the expressed needs, and then one or two others can pray a brief prayer of agreement with that prayer. There is no need for everyone to pray aloud over every need*
 - *Model conversational prayer and invite anyone else who'd like to pray to do so.*
1. Invite people to briefly share any needs that they would like for the group to pray about now and in the coming week. *(If there are lots of needs, break the group into groups of threes to pray for the needs of those people within that triad.)*

WRAP UP - 2 minutes

- *Remind the group of the next meeting time and location.*
- *Thank everyone for participating*
- *Invite people to exchange best contact information*