



# *TELL MORE* **STORIES**

— A PRACTICAL GUIDE —  
FOR STORYTELLERS  
IN THE  
*CHURCH*

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# TABLE OF *CONTENTS*

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## *INTENTIONAL*

1. **DRIVE:** What Moves You
2. **CONNECTION:** What You're Searching For
3. **RESONANCE:** What Speaks to Your Audience

## *CLEAR*

4. **SOURCE:** Finding and Recognizing Effective Stories
5. **CAPTURE:** Documenting Stories Through an Effective Interview
6. **SHARE:** Building Stories Through an Effective Edit

## *FOCUSED*

7. **WATCH:** Storytelling on Film
8. **LOOK:** Storytelling in Words and Images
9. **LISTEN:** Storytelling Through Narration



# YOU ARE A STORYTELLER

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Stories are the most compelling way to share the good news of Jesus.

You and I live in a golden age of creative storytelling. We have more opportunities and better tools to engage audiences than ever before. And as followers of Jesus, we get to share the best stories imaginable – stories of salvation, healing, restoration, perseverance, faith and forgiveness.

Maybe you're part of a church that's eager to tell stories. Maybe you're the only one who seems to have a heart for it. Whatever it is that moves you to do this work, you realize the amazing impact stories can have. The challenge is that many of us are still figuring out how to do this effectively. If you're reading this, chances are you're figuring this out right along with us.

*What kinds of stories should we be telling?  
I just saw an awesome video – how did they do that?  
Where will we find our next story?  
How can we make sure it's effective?  
Can we get it finished in time?*

There are no shortcuts or formulas that guarantee an effective story. Every story is different. Every church culture is unique. And unlike the done-for-you resources available for other church leaders – pre-made graphics, worship tracks and sermon illustrations – storytellers can't download packaged content. We have to do our own work and tell our own stories.

I've been telling stories on film for over a decade in the local church. And I lead a storytelling ministry at WoodsEdge Church near Houston, TX. Our team of staff and volunteers works throughout the year – filming, writing, interviewing and photographing people in our church.

I wrote this book because I've talked with so many other churches who are doing this ministry as well. We understand the joys and pressures of storytelling, the high expectations, the hours of work. That's where we live and we love it. We believe in the power of story.

This book is about process and practical steps. It isn't meant to be a substitute for skills training or experience. In fact, the only way we get better at storytelling is to keep working, keep learning and refine details along the way. But whoever you are, wherever you tell stories – my goal is to help you become more intentional, clear and focused. That's where we're headed. So, what can you expect from this training?

## INTENTIONALITY

Have you ever stopped to think about why you want to tell stories in the first place? Have you thought about the kinds of stories that speak to you? How do you want to approach your stories? What kind of response are you hoping for?

Intentionality is the business of identifying what you intend to do before you set out to do it. In other words, intentionality is doing things on purpose. In storytelling, this is often more of an art than a science. Sometimes we're not quite sure where we're going until we jump in. But usually I've found that, the more intentional I am as I begin a creative project, the more likely it will have the effect I was hoping for.



I want to walk you through a process to help you identify what's important to you as a storyteller, what you're looking to share, and what it looks like to resonate deeply with your audience in a way that speaks to them.

## CLARITY

Storytelling is a craft. Stories are custom-built works of art. And like any other creative endeavor, storytelling is work. Hard work. We're balancing expectations. We're making decisions. We're trying to dream and plan at the same time. It's inspiration in fast-forward.

And for all that technology has done to streamline our process, the work of creative decision-making remains as challenging as ever. In fact, it could be argued that technology makes it more challenging for creative people - heightening expectations, compressing schedules, shrinking budgets and tightening deadlines. Creating something from nothing is never as easy as it looks, no matter how many tools you have at your disposal.

It takes a clear vision and a plan to get us moving in the direction we need to go. It takes clarity to craft effective stories. We'll look at practical ways to keep you clear and on point as you push through your creative process.

## FOCUS

The final portion of this book looks at how to connect a story to an audience through different art forms. Watching a story on film is a different experience than reading one on paper. Written words affect us differently than spoken words.

More and more churches are opting to share personal stories in multiple formats - film, written, photo and audio. Stories are showing up on Facebook, on websites, in emails, on video screens, in bulletins and lobby displays. We'll take a look at each art form to discover how to effectively focus your stories.

I want to help you become a more effective storyteller. Every story we've told has taught our team something new. We're always trying to leverage these insights in any way we can. And this is why I've created this training resource.

I didn't write this book because I consider myself an expert storyteller. It's not because I've somehow cracked a code that magically makes the process easier. That code doesn't exist, or if it does I haven't found it yet. What I have found are patterns in the chaos of creativity. I've discovered some clear and practical principles to help you find language for what you're doing.

I want to share these with you to help you become a more effective storyteller. I want you to experience the deep satisfaction that comes from seeing God use your gifts in meaningful and redemptive ways. I want you to be courageous and powerful in your ministry of storytelling. I want the people whose stories you share to feel cared for and empowered - seen, heard and loved.

I want your church to have ministry impact. I want your people to hear truth that sets them free and stirs their hearts to worship. I want them to encounter beauty that amazes them and glorifies God. Stories hold so much potential to change lives in the Kingdom. And there are millions and millions waiting to be told.

I think you'll really enjoy this process. And I can't wait to see what God does through the stories He gives you to tell.

God bless you!

BRIAN



# DRIVE

## *WHAT MOVES YOU*

### *Chapter 1*

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This first chapter is designed to help you explore your own personal motivation for telling stories, identifying what truly moves you. This motivation is deeply personal for most storytellers, and it becomes a powerful guide for the kinds of stories we seek out.

Every one of us wants to create impact in our work. I've never met an artist, a pastor, a musician or a storyteller who didn't care if people responded to what they had to share. The desire to create impact is the thing we all share.

But before we can move an audience through storytelling, it's helpful to know what moves us. Maybe you can easily point to a reason you want to tell stories. Maybe there was a moment where it clicked.

My moment happened early in my life. I was 10 years old, sitting in a movie theater with my family watching E.T. The Extra Terrestrial. When the credits rolled, everyone was talking about how good of a movie it was. But I couldn't speak. I had to go be alone for a few days after. That movie messed me up for life (in a good way). I had so deeply connected with the main character, Elliott, that I remember wanting to jump through the screen and be in on the whole adventure.

In a way, I can honestly say I've been chasing that moment my whole life. I moved to Hollywood at age 19 to become a film composer. I drove to the house in LA where they shot the movie. I spent time on the sound stage where John Williams recorded his incredible score. I was on a quest to get into that story because it made such an impression on me.

What God revealed to me through that is that He gave me a desire to connect deeply with an audience. And that insight has been crucial for me as a storyteller. It's theme He keeps reminding me of all the time as I work.

## *WHY DO YOU WANT TO TELL STORIES?*

Each of us has our own reasons and motivation, our own backstory. I find that it's way too easy to skip past the why of storytelling and just get to work. After all, we've got a deadline. So we spend time trying to get better at our work. We watch what other people do and try to figure out why it works. We spend time discussing projects with our leadership, trying to figure out what they want to see happen.

At some point though, when we least expect it, we start to disconnect from the things that inspire us. We can get buried in our work and start questioning whether this is really worth the trouble.

How can we know what we're after unless we know what speaks to us? How we can expect to move an audience unless we understand what moves us?

There's a principle we talk about a lot at our church and on our Story Team – you can't give away what you don't have. If you've forgotten what moves you in your work, it becomes really challenging to move anyone else. And this disconnect starts to show up in our creative work.

Stories are about human connection. They're about vulnerability and empathy, experience and insight. Part of being an effective storyteller is connecting with what moves us personally. This speaks to our identity as believers and our intentionality as storytellers.



## *THIS DIDN'T START WITH YOU.*

God has a beautiful way of moving us through the chapters of our own stories. What I encourage storytellers to do is to spend time with God and ask Him to speak into this question of motivation. So often, God reveals profound memories and insights that connect our story and help us understand more of it.

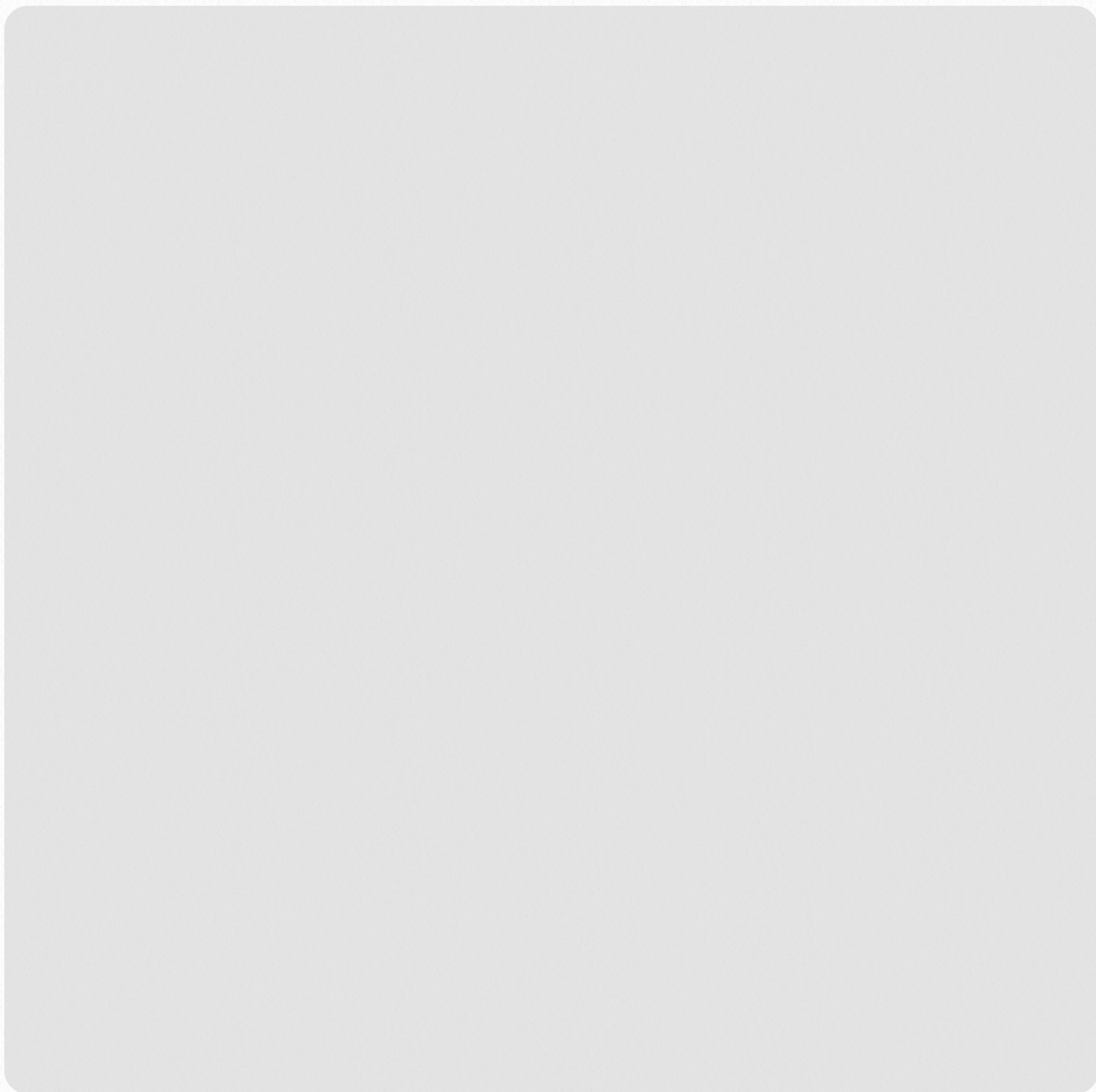
Remember, this whole thing was His idea to begin with. Before you move ahead in the training, get alone with God and ask Him to speak to you. See what He has to say. Ask Him to show you when He birthed this desire in you.

This doesn't have to happen all at once. My experience is that God is creative in how He chooses to reveal things. When He does show you something, ask Him what He wants you to know about it and write it down. (It'll help you much more than anything else in this training.)



## *WAS THERE A MOMENT . . .*

Take a few minutes and think about a moment in your life when you realized you had something you wanted to say. Maybe it was a book you read, something you watched. Maybe there was a person who saw something in you and called it out. Naming this is an important part of your story. When you identify and connect to that moment, you start to see what moves you.





# WHAT DRAWS YOU IN?

Stories can be about anything. Think about the kinds of stories you feel drawn into. Often, we are personally moved by specific ideas and themes. Select 5 themes that resonate with you and rate them 1 to 5 in order of personal importance. If you don't see a theme listed, write it in. *(Just a note: be honest with yourself about what you care about. Don't just select themes that sound good spiritually. There are no right or wrong answers, just honest and dishonest ones.)*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Beauty

\_\_\_\_\_ Community

\_\_\_\_\_ Discipleship / Spiritual Growth

\_\_\_\_\_ Dreams / Visions

\_\_\_\_\_ Emotional Healing

\_\_\_\_\_ Encouragement

\_\_\_\_\_ Faith / Belief

\_\_\_\_\_ Forgiveness

\_\_\_\_\_ Freedom

\_\_\_\_\_ God's Grace

\_\_\_\_\_ Hope

\_\_\_\_\_ Identity in Christ

\_\_\_\_\_ Justice (Social, Racial, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Kindness

\_\_\_\_\_ Love

\_\_\_\_\_ Marriage

\_\_\_\_\_ Mercy

\_\_\_\_\_ Miracles / Signs & Wonders

\_\_\_\_\_ Physical Healing

\_\_\_\_\_ Paradigm Shifts / Epiphanies

\_\_\_\_\_ Peacemaking

\_\_\_\_\_ Potential

\_\_\_\_\_ Relationships

\_\_\_\_\_ Redemption / Restoration

\_\_\_\_\_ Rest / Shelter

\_\_\_\_\_ Salvation / Baptism / New Life

\_\_\_\_\_ Suffering / Struggle

\_\_\_\_\_ Vision

\_\_\_\_\_ Wisdom / Insight

\_\_\_\_\_ (Other) \_\_\_\_\_
- # EXPLAIN WHY.
- Take your top 5 themes. Briefly explain what these mean to you and why they are important to you personally.
- 
- 7



## *DESCRIBE YOURSELF AS A STORYTELLER.*

Based on what you've discovered, describe yourself as a storyteller in a few sentences. Try to be specific. Rewrite it as many times as you want.



The truth is that you'll tell all kinds of stories throughout your life. If you do this professionally, you'll tell plenty of stories that don't really move you. But if you understand what does move you, that will have its own way of making your work stand out. The goal is to become more intentional as a storyteller, to understand what you care about and why. When you start to see this and own it, you'll become more effective as a storyteller.



# CONNECTION

Chapter 2

## *WHAT WE'RE SEARCHING FOR*

This training is designed to help you understand the powerful connections that stories create. Stories can connect us with truth and meaning. They can connect us with beauty and wonder. They can connect us with God. They can connect us to each other. The power of storytelling has to do with a meaningful sense of connection.

You may have noticed that our culture has recently become enamored with all things story. And this fascination is mirrored in the church. We see it all around us – share your story, hear our story, live a better story, join the story. And we seem hardwired to search out a narrative, determined to connect the events of our lives in a way that gives them meaning. We're rediscovering something that's been around as long as human beings – the power of story.

If you're passionate about telling stories, you're passionate about the powerful connections that they can create. Now that you've described the kind of storyteller you are, it's time to identify the connection you want to create through the stories you tell. What will this look like in the context of your church? What does it mean to tell a powerful story?

And how will we know what to look for? Should our stories always be upbeat and encouraging? Or should we talk about pain and doubt and disappointment? Should we illustrate specific themes that relate to everyday people? Or should we focus more on the attributes of God?

If you tell stories in a local church, these are the kinds of questions you're likely to be faced with (among many others.) Part of becoming an intentional storyteller is to define what you're setting out to do. So what are we searching for in the stories we tell?

## *HOW STORIES CONNECT*

In my experience as a storyteller, I've found that the power of connection lies in two elements – truth and beauty. These are two things that we have been created to respond to. God is truth and He is beauty. Since we bear God's image, we are powerfully drawn and connected to things we find beautiful and true.

When we encounter truth and beauty in a story, it draws us in. We connect. It's a moment I would describe as emotional honesty. We're inspired by the beauty of how God works, and we're set free by the truth of who God is. This provides a deep connection that we're been searching for – to know that God is good, that He's at work, and that we're not alone. This is the power of story. And as storytellers, this is what we're searching for.

## *TRUTH*

The best stories are anchored in truth. This is something that can be easy to agree with but difficult to do, even in church. I'm not suggesting that we attempt to be dishonest in church. It's subtler than that. Sometimes we prefer to only share what's positive and edit out what's uncomfortable and raw. Sometimes we'd rather share light without mentioning darkness. We'd rather talk about our victories while skirting past our defeats. We want to discuss our spiritual insights without sharing the painful road we traveled to find them. This is understandable, but it's not storytelling.



Truth makes a connection through the conflict of a story. When we downplay difficulty and hardship in our stories, we lessen the power and impact our stories can have. This is because most people are dealing with some unresolved conflict in their lives right now. When we're willing to be vulnerable, to own our story and be honest, we begin to share a kind of authentic truth that liberates and empowers people, proving that they're not alone. It's the kind of truth we're created to search for.

We shared a film with our church this past year about a couple whose marriage had completely collapsed. The husband's alcoholism was part of the story. The wife's determination to control the situation was another part of it. Nothing seemed to help, things kept getting worse. Eventually everything fell apart, and it was time for her to take the kids and move out. If you heard the story, you would probably have agreed with her decision.

We asked this couple to share what this darkness and difficulty felt like, because we know there are hurting marriages throughout our church. We also know that many of these couples are suffering in silence, terrified of the mess in their lives, convinced that they're on their own. By intentionally sharing this couple's honest struggles, we resisted the temptation to resolve things too quickly or easily. God did heal their marriage in a beautiful way, but it took years. After the services, this couple agreed to stand in the lobby and meet people who wanted to talk about their story. There was a line out the door.

As a storyteller in the church, you have the opportunity to be intentional - to find and share true stories with people who need to be set free. As you seek out stories of life change in your church, don't shy away from conflict and mess. Conflict and mess is where most of us live. Don't allow these things to be overlooked or edited out. Jesus is a light that's bright enough to overcome all of our darkness.

The best stories tell the truth. This is where we find our hope.

## BEAUTY

If truth connects through conflict, beauty connects through resolution. Just as our minds are created to resonate deeply with truth, our hearts are created to respond deeply to beauty. Beauty points us to design and purpose. More accurately, it points us to our Designer. Beauty stirs the heart of a worshiper.

Often in storytelling, we get to share beautiful things. New life, healing, rescue, a renewed faith in God - these all point to the goodness of God and the reality of His advancing Kingdom on earth. Stories can remind us that our suffering, as real and painful as it may be, is not in vain. None of it is wasted or lost on God. He redeems it all for His glory. That's not to say that every story will perfectly resolve with a miraculous happy ending. Sometimes redemption looks more like new perspective on circumstances that haven't changed yet.

Last year, our team shared a story of an older man in our church who had been diagnosed with oral cancer. When he showed up for his interview, he told us that he was having surgery to remove his tongue the day after tomorrow. He wasn't sure if he would ever be able to speak again. So it was important to him to share his story today.

During his interview, he shared a powerful vision he had of God embracing him and holding him as a loving father would hold a child. This encounter with God had meant so much to him that it transformed his entire perspective on his suffering. He praised God over and over as he shared, displaying a faith that only comes from someone who knows his Father intimately. He finished his story by saying, "I still have cancer, but I have Jesus. And that's all I need." His resolution came in his resolve to trust God.

Miracles are beautiful, but so is faith and perseverance. These things point to God's goodness and faithfulness, His flawless design and redemption, even in the midst of suffering. Stories can remind us that God is better than we believe and closer than we realize.



Ok, this all sounds great (you may be saying.) I'd love to find stories like this. How do I find them? Where do I even start? The truth is that, as much as we secretly hope to find shortcuts and formulas, identifying powerful stories is a process. But it's a process that you can engage in with intentionality. Here are three suggestions to help you find stories that connect in an emotionally honest way.

## *SEEK GOD*

How often do we jump right into a project, look to make a powerful connection through a story, only to completely bypass our true Source of power and connection? If you believe that God has given you a desire to tell stories, you can trust Him to connect you with the stories you're designed to share. Ask Him to speak to you and to build your faith in this process of discovering stories.

## *LISTEN*

Intentional storytelling starts with good listening. Jesus would often say "Whoever has ears, let him hear." In other words, "Listen up!" Pay attention to what is God doing in your church. Who has encountered God lately? Who's taking a leap of faith in some area of their life? Who's serving others selflessly? Who walked through a tough situation and made it through? Find people like this and listen to what they have to share. Their stories may be more powerful than anyone realizes.

## *DISCERN*

One of the most exciting and challenging parts of the storytelling process is discovering a powerful story and deciding what you want to do with it. This can be exhilarating if it sets you into creative motion. Or this can overwhelm you and get you stuck, making you feel like you have to figure everything out at once. The way to get unstuck is to step back, identify the connection you want to make with an audience, and discern if you're able to begin working towards that. Remember, creativity is a discovery process. If you lose your bearings, remind yourself of what you've set out to do.

Describe the connection you want to make through your storytelling. Think about what it means to engage your audience with truth and beauty, telling emotionally honest stories that resonate with people and point them to the goodness of God. Again, the goal is to become more intentional in your work, to identify what you're after. Put some language around this. This can become a powerful filter to describe the kind of work you do as a storyteller.



# RESONANCE

## Chapter 3

### *WHAT SPEAKS TO YOUR AUDIENCE*

Over the last decade of doing this work, I have found that storytelling is a unique balancing act. Other creative arts have more to do with creative expression. Songwriters, lyricists, poets, painters and dancers – these are people who have the instinct to comment on the world and express how they feel through their art. In contrast, communicators – pastors, preachers, thought leaders and teachers – these are people who have the instinct to connect an idea with an audience.

But as storytellers, we have to balance three sets of instincts. First, we are artists with things we want to express. Second, we are interpreters of someone else's story, trying to draw out what's beautiful and true. Third, we are communicators, trying to engage an audience in a way that resonates. If you've ever wondered why good storytelling is such hard work, there you go. You have plenty to consider before you even get to work.

This is one of the reasons why it's important to start your process with intentionality. You need to know what you're setting out to do before you figure out how to do it. In Chapter 1, we discussed what kind of storyteller you are. In Chapter 2, we looked at identifying the connection you want to make in the stories you tell.

This chapter is designed to help you understand your audience. This is the third piece of the puzzle in the storyteller's balancing act – you, your story, and your audience. The more you understand the culture of your church, the more intentional and effective you can be in your work.

## *CULTURE*

When my wife and I were in our late twenties, we had the opportunity to move to Sweden and serve as missionary youth leaders. We were newlyweds living in Northern California, close to family and serving at a church we loved in the Silicon Valley. Yet God was very clear that this was the next thing for us. So we started raising support, we did our missions training, we sold most of our stuff, and applied for visas. A year later, there we were – two American kids in Scandinavia.

At first, we loved every moment – new friends, new traditions, lots of Swedish meatballs and trips to IKEA. But a few months in, we realized how different a world this was than what we were used to in California. People communicated differently, not just in another language, but in lots of nonverbal ways that were lost on us. Whereas Americans tend to be outgoing and social, Swedes tend to be polite and reserved. We tend to think bigger is always better, they prefer balance and serenity.

One evening, we were invited over for dinner in the home of a Swedish family from church. Both my wife and I tend to be talkers. And as Americans, we “knew” that it's helpful to keep a conversation moving forward in any way possible. Unfortunately, we didn't realize how different the social rules in Sweden are. Long pauses over dinner aren't awkward at all. They're perfectly normal and (to Swedes) actually kind of nice. In a culture where people avoid drawing too much attention to themselves, there's no reason to keep chatting just for the sake of it.

As the evening wore on, my wife and I kept the conversation going around the dinner table, long after we had run out of interesting things to talk about. Our hosts were polite and gracious with their American guests. They listened carefully and tried to keep up with us. I remember we both thought, “Why are these guys so quiet?” I'm sure they were thinking, “When are these Americans ever going to shut up?”



Every culture has agreed-upon ways that things are done. In fact, this is largely what culture is – it’s how we do what we do. Families have a certain culture. So do workplaces. So do churches. There are values. There are rituals and traditions. There are power structures and circles of influence. There are rules and boundaries, some verbal and some nonverbal. Some cultures get loud and emotional. Others remain calm and stoic. Some have a great sense of humor. Others not so much.

As a storyteller, it is vital that you understand the culture in which you’re communicating. In doing this, you can connect your stories with the cultural values held by your church. Otherwise your best intentions can be lost on your audience.

## UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

Part of being a storyteller is being an observer. Have you ever stopped to notice the culture that you’re a part of? Churches have become more intentional about defining a vision, a mission and a set of values. Maybe you know these by heart. But how would you describe your culture? How things are done?

If you’ve been in your church for a while and fully adapted, it might help you to become more observational about the people you want to communicate with. Take a few minutes and answer these questions about your church.

**What things do we value most as a church culture? What are the things we talk about all the time?**

**What are some of nonverbal rules of our culture? What are our traditions?**



**What words would first-time guests use to describe our church culture?**

**Stories can be encouraging, but they can also be challenging. In what ways does our culture need to be challenged? In what ways do we need to be encouraged?**

*RESONATE*

A picture is hopefully beginning to emerge in your mind about the culture where you tell stories. This is valuable insight for any communicator, but especially valuable for a storyteller. Because we’re looking to make a powerful connection through our stories, it helps to become a student of our audience.

Of course we’re painting with broad strokes here. Every person in your audience has a unique identity and is on a specific journey. The point isn’t to file people into categories. The point is to visualize the people you’re talking to. The more you can visualize and understand your audience, the more likely you can share stories with themes that resonate deeply with them.

Because I’m a musician, I often think about how certain styles of music sound in certain rooms. An orchestra sounds best in a concert hall. A choir sounds amazing in a cathedral. A band sounds great in a venue with tight acoustics and a killer sound system. The right kind of room cooperates with the music to make it sound better. It resounds with what’s being played. Conversely, music played in the wrong kind of room has just the opposite effect. It lessens the impact that music can have.

I’ve watched videos that didn’t seem to fit the culture of the church I was sitting in. Maybe they made more sense in a different



church environment. Maybe the leadership liked it and thought it would inspire people, but something was lost in translation. This happens a lot in the church these days. Ideas get copied and widely distributed. Sometimes they resonate, sometimes they don't.

Think about this as a storyteller. How do you want your stories to connect with your audience? What's going to resonate with your church family? What's going to inspire them, challenge them, or set them free? The more you understand your audience, the more intentional and effective you can be as you craft stories.

## *YOUR AUDIENCE*

Take a few moments to describe the audience God has given to you in your church. Visualize them. Who are they? Where are they coming from? What are they searching for? What kinds of stories would resonate with them?



# How I Tell Stories

These first three trainings are designed to help you put language around what you’re doing. When you can describe what you’re setting out to do, you can be more intentional as a storyteller. You’ve done the work. Now you can use this worksheet as a resource for planning future projects. Describe what you’re setting out to do. Revise and rewrite it as many times as you like. I’d suggest putting this somewhere where you’ll see it often. Do whatever will help you become more effective as you tell more stories.

**DRIVE: Why I Tell Stories**

**CONNECTION: The Kinds of Stories I Tell**

**RESONANCE: My Audience**



# SOURCE

Chapter 4

## FINDING AND RECOGNIZING EFFECTIVE STORIES

### CLARITY

Chapters 1-3 of this book are about identifying what you're setting out to do as a storyteller, what it looks like to tell stories on purpose. In the next three chapters, we'll look at how to actually get to work. Good storytelling starts with intentionality, but it takes clarity to get moving on your story.

It's probably helpful to define what we mean by clarity. In the context of storytelling, I define clarity as having a clear vision and a clear plan. A clear vision is a sense of the direction we'd like to go with a particular story. A clear plan is the way we think we'll actually get there. Our plan might have to be adjusted, but our vision is like a compass that points us in the direction we want to go.

One of the myths of the creative process is that it's an inspirational free-for-all. This mostly isn't true. There are times where we can conjure up our imagination and dream up new ideas we think people will love. But creativity is usually about solving a problem in a way we haven't seen before. And, despite what many people think, the limitations we face (time, budget and expectations) can actually help our creative process instead of hinder it.

I love watching competitive cooking shows. Watching them actually helps me relax in a weird way (maybe because it makes the work I'm doing seem less stressful). The formula of the shows is nearly always the same: Here's the challenge, here's the timeframe, here's the raw ingredients. Oh and feel free to wow the judges. Your time starts ... now! Good luck!

One night I was watching one of these shows while I was finishing an edit. Suddenly it dawned on me how similar these chefs' process is to our process as storytellers. Think about it. Here's the idea, here's the timeframe, here's the raw ingredients of a story. We can't wait to see what you come up with! Sunday's on the way! Knock 'em dead!

How do you keep from getting lost in the long, relentless process of bringing a story to life? You cast a vision and come up with some sort of plan. Remember, creativity mostly has to do with solving a practical problem. What direction are we headed and how will we get there?

The first step is finding and recognizing your next story. That's what this chapter is about.

### WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

If you think about how a chef prepares a meal in his restaurant, it usually begins with a trip to a farmer's market. A good chef knows which ingredients are in season. He knows the farmers. He listens to what they have to say about their food. As he shops for his ingredients, he pays attention to what they look like, how they taste. A vision starts to take shape about the dish he wants to prepare for his guests.

As storytellers, we're on a similar mission. We search for stories that are in season, at a point where someone is ready to say something that people need to hear. We pay close attention to what the story is really about, who's telling it, and whether it's



something that we can work with.

Now to be honest, sometimes the process isn't quite that inspired. Sometimes you get handed a project and told that you need to make it work. That's pretty common in the church. It happens to me all the time. But even when you don't get to choose your own story, the principle remains. We're looking for something we can work with.

As you start to form a vision and a plan for your story, here are some clarifying questions to help you find what you're looking for. These are some of the questions our team uses to assess a new story.

Does this story ring true? Is it emotionally honest?

Is this person ready to share their story?

How does God impact this story?

What's beautiful and hopeful about this story?

What are some truths in this story that our people would find life-giving?

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Part of assessing a story involves discerning whether it's a good fit for your church. Again, sometimes you'll have more of a say in this process, sometimes you won't. When you do, try to envision how a potential story will work within your church.

Back to our chef for a moment, let's say he works at an Italian restaurant. When he's shopping for the best ingredients, it's safe to assume he's looking for things that would make sense on his menu. He might find some exotic Indian spices or some beautiful Mexican avocados at the market, but it's not what he's after.

After years of storytelling, our Story Team decided to name three essential elements a potential story needs to have in order to be a good fit for our church. This took some time and a lot of observation. I had always used gut instinct in selecting stories. Let's call it the "I know it when I hear it" approach. It worked fine.

But as our team began to get more specific about what we wanted, something happened. We started getting better stories to work with. And we had better ideas of how to treat the stories we found. There are a number of elements we look for in a potential story, but these three have become essential, helping us clarify the kinds of stories we want to share.

The first element is what we would call the God Element. This might seem obvious, but if God doesn't play a starring role in a story, it's not likely a story that we'll share. Our stories are about how God works, the good news of the Gospel, and the coming of God's Kingdom. So, that one's kind of a deal breaker.

The second element is what we would call the Family Element. Does this story fit the culture of our church family? Would this resonate with our leaders and our people? Does this feel like us? Does it sound like us? Honestly, some stories fit well and some don't. This can be very subjective, but it's part of our discernment process.

The third element is what we would call the Me-Too Element. Does this story speak to issues that everyday people can easily relate with? Will this genuinely help people and bring them hope? Sometimes churches only tell big, heroic stories of big, heroic faith. This can be inspiring, but we also want our stories to connect real truth with real people. So we actively search for stories that are relatable, not just impressive.

We know our church culture and you know yours. As a storyteller, it's important for you to discern stories that will that speak to your audience - theologically, culturally, and personally. Consider naming elements you believe are essential for stories to be a good fit in your church.



## WHERE TO FIND NEW STORIES

Sometimes stories come to us. But many times we need to actively seek out potential leads. On our team, we tend to go through seasons where we have lots of stories on hand, and other seasons where it seems like we have almost none.

Here are a few places we regularly look for new stories at our church.

**Lead Pastor.** Our pastor is the most identifiable face and voice of our church, which means that people regularly seek him out to share what God's doing in their lives.

**Prayer Ministry.** Prayer ministries are a great resource for potential stories. If God has answered someone's prayer, they're often the first ones to know about it.

**Care Ministry.** Care ministries can be another resource for storytelling, assuming someone is willing and ready to share a situation that they've walked through and appropriate precautions are taken for privacy concerns.

**Ministry Leaders.** Staff and volunteer leaders in your church will often have stories from their areas of ministry - including Children's, Students, and Adult Ministries.

**Small Group Leaders.** Small groups can be a great resource for new stories in your church.

**Partner Ministries.** If your church partners with para-church ministries in your community, these ministry leaders will often have stories of what God's doing in people's lives.

**Email & Announcements.** Invite people to share their story with you, either via email invitation, in an announcement or on a slide, or on your website or social media.

## CLEAR VISION, CLEAR PLAN

Once you've found your story, you've assessed it, and you've decided to tell it, it's time to start casting a clear vision and creating a clear plan. This is the clarity that will help see you through your creative process.

You might be inspired by a vision right away. If so, congratulations! If not, revisit the worksheet you just completed before this chapter. Remind yourself of why you do this work, what you're setting out to do, what kind of connection you want to make (truth & beauty), and what speaks to your audience. This can help stir a vision for your project. Whenever you find your vision, write it down!

Your next step is to begin creating a plan. Here are some helpful things to consider as you get started.

How much time do I have?

What's my budget?

Are there other people that can help me with this project?

Do I have the equipment I need?

How many interviews should we plan for?

Think through your story and write it down - questions, themes, ideas, locations, people. If you've found what you're looking for, you're well on your way. The following page is our Story Team's assessment form for potential stories. Feel free to use this as a resource to jumpstart your process.



# STORY ASSESSMENT FORM

WHO IS THE MAIN SUBJECT OF THIS STORY?

---

HOW WOULD YOU TITLE OR TWEET THIS STORY?

---

PLEASE PROVIDE A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE STORY

---

HOW HAS GOD IMPACTED THIS STORY?:

---

---

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THEMES YOU SEE IN THIS STORY? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

Addiction / Adoption / Baptism / Blessing / Children / Community / Discipleship / Disappointment / Doubt / Emotional Healing / Evangelism / Faith / Family / Foster Care / Forgiveness / Hospitality / Identity in Christ / International Missions / Local Missions / Marriage / Parenting / Physical Healing / Prayer / Redemption / Serving / Worship

Other Themes: : \_\_\_\_\_

DOES THIS PERSON ATTEND OUR CHURCH?: Yes / No / Not Sure

WHAT MINISTRY AREA (IF ANY) IS THIS STORY CONNECTED TO? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

Care / Children's / Community Life / Communications / Creative Arts / Cross-Cultural / Discipleship / Evangelism / International Missions / Local Missions / Media / Men's Ministry / Prayer / Students / Welcome Ministry / Women's Ministry / Worship & Music

WHAT ADJECTIVES WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE THE PERSON SHARING? \_\_\_\_\_

IN YOUR OPINION, IS THIS PERSON READY TO SHARE THEIR STORY? Yes / No / Not Sure

DO YOU OR THEY HAVE ANY HESITATIONS AT THIS POINT? \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT ABOUT THIS STORY WILL RESONATE MOST WITH PEOPLE AT OUR CHURCH? \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE EVALUATE THIS STORY BASED ON THE 3 ELEMENTS CRITERIA

[CIRCLE A NUMBER FROM 1 to 10]:

THE GOD ELEMENT - Clearly demonstrates God showing up [ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ]

THE FAMILY ELEMENT - Clearly fits the culture and values of our church [ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ]

THE 'ME TOO' ELEMENT - Clearly resonates with everyday people [ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ]

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT WOULD BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE FORMAT TO SHARE THIS STORY AND WHY?

Video / Written & Photo / Written / Audio

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE WE SHOULD CONSIDER IN SHARING THIS STORY? \_\_\_\_\_

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# CAPTURE

Chapter 5

## *DOCUMENTING STORIES THROUGH AN EFFECTIVE INTERVIEW*

### *GETTING ORGANIZED*

Now that you've found the story you're looking for, it's time to get organized. Consider our friend, the chef, who has just returned to his kitchen with an armful of beautiful ingredients from the market. He found what he was looking for, but his real work is only just beginning.

Unless he's planning to serve his guests raw ingredients for dinner, he has to start the process of getting his kitchen together. He breaks down and deconstructs his raw ingredients to draw out flavors and textures - peeling, slicing and dicing - getting everything organized and ready to cook.

The main ingredient in any story is an interview. Storytellers break down and deconstruct our stories by engaging in a clear interview process. This is essential to clarifying the vision and plan for our stories. This is also an area where thoughtfulness and preparation really pay off down the road.

To be honest, I used to rush past the process of preparing for interviews. I was too impatient to do it. I'm a pretty conversational person, so engaging a discussion comes naturally. I would make sure that the interview felt natural, the story was compelling, and that we covered all the good parts.

But sometimes I would find myself sitting across from someone, cameras still rolling, and wondering if we got everything we needed. Occasionally panic would set in. Are we good? Did we cover everything? What did we miss?

### *RELATIONSHIP AND TRUST*

My lack of patience and preparation was in conflict with a few fundamental principles of storytelling. First, stories are about connection. Personal connection only happens in an environment of trust, and trust only happens in relationship. Without investing time and effort to build a relationship and establish trust with the people we interview, it's not likely that they'll be comfortable sharing their most vulnerable moments with us. In fact, it's unfair to ask someone to do this.

Share a meal or two with the person you want to interview. Let your guard down with them the way you're asking them to do with you. Invest your time and build a connection of trust. I have learned that this is one of the most important elements, even when time is in short supply.

### *A BEGINNING, A MIDDLE, AND AN END*

The second fundamental principle I had to learn was this - stories have a narrative structure. They start somewhere, go somewhere, and land somewhere. I was only focusing on what was interesting or noteworthy. I wasn't thinking through the story arc on behalf of my character and my audience. And I had no idea what I was missing out on.



Imagine that you're listening to your favorite song. You turn up the volume and you let it take over. You get into it. You know all your favorite parts, that one lyric, that big chorus where the band kicks in. You know that song and you love that song.

Now imagine that your friend just asked you to sing that song at her wedding. You still know and love the song, but now you have to learn it. You have to start studying how the song works. It probably starts with some sort of intro, then maybe a verse or two. Then comes the chorus, a bridge and a final chorus at the end. You have to understand how the song is built before you can share it with anyone else.

Stories work in much the same way as song. They are built. There is a structure that guides the narrative. If you're listening to a great story, you probably won't notice it. You'll just be taking it in. But if you're attempting to tell a great story, if you want to craft and share stories effectively with an audience, you need to understand how stories are built.

There are several variants to the terms below, but this is a basic narrative structure of the events or "story turns" in the stories we want to tell.

**Exposition**

We're introduced to our character, who they are, where they're from, what they want.

**Inciting Incident**

Something goes wrong, it's unwelcome and unexpected, now there's a problem.

**Rising Tension**

Our character tries to control things, it doesn't work, things fall apart.

**Moment of Truth**

Our character hits a wall, they're out of options, God steps in.

**Falling Tension**

God changes a situation, transforms a perspective, our character realizes God is in control.

**Resolution**

Things are different, our character knows things now, life is no longer the same.

Like the verses and choruses of a song, stories are built around a structure of a character, a conflict and a resolution. This tension and release is part of what draws an audience into a great story and holds their interest all the way through.

## *WRITE IT DOWN*

When our team decides to tell a story, our first step is to ask the person to write it down. This has become crucial to our process. We have found that, when stories are verbal, they tend to change every time someone shares them. People remember some things, they forget other things. Occasionally they wander off and get lost in the details. Sometimes they never land the plane and resolve the story.

Think about it. If you're telling stories in a church, you're probably asking people to do something they've never done before. It's a big step, and they don't know what you're looking for. Some people will just share their entire life story. They don't know which details you want and which ones you don't, so they might share them all. When a story is written out, it's much easier to see a structure emerge.



# BREAK IT DOWN

Once you have a story in written form, you can begin to use narrative structure to start deconstructing your story into interview questions. The purpose of these questions is to draw out each element (or story turn) so that it can be reconstructed later in an edit. Here are some questions our Story Team often asks in interviews:

## **Exposition**

Tell us about yourself growing up. What was life like for you?  
How did you see God? When did you come to faith in Jesus?  
Where does your story start?

## **Inciting Incident**

Describe when things started to go wrong.  
What was going through your head at the time?  
How did it feel to walk through that?

## **Rising Tension**

How did you try to handle the situation?  
How did it affect your relationships?  
How did affect your view of God?

## **Moment of Truth**

How did God enter the picture?  
What happened next?

## **Falling Tension**

How did things begin to change?

## **Resolution**

How is your life different now?  
What do realize about God now that you've walked through this?

Interviews are more art than science. They are dynamic conversations. There is no magic formula that results in the perfect interview. Some people will be ready to share their story without a lot of questions. And it's usually best to let them do that. Other people will need you to guide them step by step. In either case, it helps to be prepared to follow a narrative structure in your interview. This helps you keep a clear vision and clear plan for your story. Remember, your main task as a storyteller is to connect your story to an audience.

Alex Blumberg, a former producer for NPR's *This American Life*, has spent years interviewing people and telling their stories. He encourages interviewers to pay close attention to how they themselves react to a story. If you're curious about something in the story, your audience probably will be too - so spend some more time on that part. If something bores you, chances are it'll bore your audience. If you're confused by a detail, clarify that in the interview.

This is great advice because it points to a fundamental truth about your role as a storyteller. You're always acting on behalf of your audience. You get to react to the story before they do. It hits you first, and you get to decide how you want it to hit your audience. So your job becomes sharing the most compelling, poignant, and meaningful portions of that story for the benefit of others. And it all starts with your interview.



## THE PREP

Everyone wants to do a good job of telling their story. I have yet to meet someone who didn't care how they came across. You can set them up for a win by explaining the process before you begin recording your interview. Here are a few examples of things our team discusses with people ahead of their interview.

### **What They Need to Know**

If you're filming your story, discuss the location, what time they should arrive, and some options of what they should wear.

### **The Interview Process**

Let them know how many people will be on set, and generally how long things will take. It usually takes about an hour for us to arrive on location and set up one interview shot. We don't share interview questions because we don't want scripted answers, but we give them an idea of how things will go. Also, we often film interviews twice to get multiple options to use in an edit. Communicate what the schedule will look like.

### **The B-Roll Process**

If you're filming additional B-Roll for the story, explain what you need them to do, where you want to film, and what the schedule will look like.

## THE PRE-INTERVIEW

When it's time to record an interview, you're probably already thinking through a number of creative and technical details your story will need (more about that later). But it's important to be present for the person you're interviewing.

Take a moment to realize how intimidating it is to sit down and be vulnerable in front of strangers, lights and cameras. I highly recommend having someone on set whose role is host and interviewer, someone the person knows who naturally puts people at ease.

It helps for the host / interviewer to take the person off set for a brief walk-through of what's about to happen. This helps build trust, eases tension and clarifies expectations. Here are a few examples of things our hosts / interviewers communicate during a pre-interview.

### **You're Here For Them**

It helps to reassure people that, even though this feels vulnerable and intimidating, they're not alone. You're going to walk them through the process. They won't have to look at the camera, they can talk to you the whole time.

### **This is a Conversation**

You're not asking them to give a speech. They can relax, this is not a performance. They can always say something a second time. You'll ask follow-up questions so nothing gets missed. If they say something they don't like, you can make sure it gets edited out.

### **Rephrasing Questions**

Even though you'll be asking questions, they will be edited out. Encourage them to rephrase each question into an answer, which helps an editor assemble their answers as complete thoughts. For example, the question of "how did you feel when that happened?" Instead of answering, "anxious and afraid," they should answer, "I was feeling anxious and afraid."



### **How Their Story Will Be Used**

People want to know when and where you plan to share their story. Give them some context of the setting and the audience. It's also a good idea to have them sign a media consent form, giving your church express permission to use their image and voice.

### **Let's Pray**

Ask God to speak clearly and powerfully through this story. Ask Him to use it to glorify Himself, to encourage people, and to set them free.

## *THE INTERVIEW*

Now it's time to roll camera . Here are a few tips that help our team during the interview process.

### **Lock In**

Keep eye contact and stay engaged. Try your best to focus on what they're sharing, as if you're in a genuine conversation (because you are).

### **Read The Moment**

If a person is sharing freely, let them share freely. If they need questions to prompt their answers, refer to your questions.

### **Disarm & Empathize**

Storytelling is confession, and confession can be emotional. The more vulnerable people are willing to be with their hardship, the more powerfully their stories can connect with hurting people. Give people permission to open up and share how they feel.

### **Stay In Their Story**

Sometimes, especially in church settings, people will feel the need to add spiritual insight into their story. Some people even preach a little bit or start quoting Scripture. That may be part of your church culture, but it resolves things too early. It's important for you to help people stay in their story as they tell it. Follow-up questions like "Then what happened?" can be helpful with this.

### **Take Two**

We like to record an interview twice if possible. It can help to reduce the pressure of things needing to be perfect the first time through. Some people share much more confidently and succinctly the second time through because the pressure is off. But it's a judgment call. Sometimes, once is enough.

### **Keep Rolling**

Once you're done, consider keeping your cameras rolling. Now the pressure really is off and everyone is relaxed. Sometimes the very best insight comes after the official interview is done. Let people keep talking if they have more to say. (Note: don't be sneaky if you capture an unguarded moment. Let them know if you plan to use it and explain why.)

There's a lot of prep work that goes into a story interview. This may feel like a lot of info to keep up with. Feel free to use whatever you find useful. By staying clear in your vision and your plan, you'll create the conditions for an effective interview and a compelling story for your audience.



# INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

## **WRITE IT DOWN**

\_\_\_ Ask for a written version of the story.

## **RELATIONSHIP AND TRUST**

\_\_\_ Share a meal or two. Get to know your subject and their story.

## **BREAK IT DOWN - Use narrative structure to create your interview questions.**

\_\_\_ Exposition - Who's the character?

\_\_\_ Inciting Incident - What went wrong?

\_\_\_ Rising Tension - How did things fall apart?

\_\_\_ Moment of Truth - How did God step in?

\_\_\_ Falling Tension - What began to change?

\_\_\_ Resolution - What's the moral of this story?

## **THE PREP - Communicate details ahead of time.**

\_\_\_ Location - Where will you record your interview?

\_\_\_ Call Time - What time should they arrive?

\_\_\_ Clothes - What should they wear?

\_\_\_ Schedule - How long will the interview take?

\_\_\_ Process - How will the interview process work?

## **THE PRE-INTERVIEW - Reassure and prepare your interviewee.**

\_\_\_ You're Here for Them - They're not alone. You'll walk them through the process.

\_\_\_ This Is a Conversation - This is not a performance or a speech.

\_\_\_ Rephrasing Questions - Answer questions with complete sentences.

\_\_\_ How Their Story Will Be Used - Discuss your plans. Sign a consent form.

\_\_\_ Let's Pray - Ask God to speak clearly and powerfully through this story.

## **THE INTERVIEW - Let's roll.**

\_\_\_ Lock In - Keep eye contact and stay engaged.

\_\_\_ Read the Moment - Let them share freely, use questions if needed.

\_\_\_ Disarm & Empathize - Give them permission to share how they feel.

\_\_\_ Stay in Their Story - Don't resolve conflict too early. "Then what happened?"

\_\_\_ Take Two - Record the interview a second time for editing options and clarity.

\_\_\_ Keep Rolling - Let people keep talking after you're officially done. (But don't be sneaky.)



## *BUILDING STORIES THROUGH AN EFFECTIVE EDIT*

### *SUBTRACTION, ADDITION, AND ASSEMBLY*

Post-production is where a story really begins to take shape. It's where your intentionality, clarity and focus all converge to build a story that connects with an audience. You bring your unique perspective as a storyteller, the power of your story, and begin focusing it into a work of art.

It would be nearly impossible to discuss every detail that will come up as you edit your story. I don't think that would be a good use of your time, so we won't attempt to do that here. In the chapters ahead, we'll discuss some specific ways to focus your story into various art forms – film, audio, and written narrative. But in this chapter, we're going to look at a process to help you clarify what you have, what you need, and where you want to take your story.

Let's revisit our chef in the kitchen one last time. It's now mid-afternoon. His guests are arriving in just a few hours. The ingredients are laid out in front of him, prepped and ready. He begins cooking a test version of the dish to share with his kitchen staff. He adds his ingredients one by one, just as planned, tasting as he goes. He shares the dish with his staff. How's the texture? Does it need more sweetness? Less sauce? How's the temperature?

This is the point in a chef's process when the clock is ticking and things need to move forward. But there's probably just enough time for one or two more ideas, a few new additions to his dish. Maybe he takes an ingredient out. It's not a complete rethink. More like a remix – of his spices, sauces, and temperatures – to get the dish right where he wants it to be. For our chef, it's a balance of technique and trial-and-error. But it still comes down to clarity, a vision and a plan. When his guests take their first taste, they'll get all the benefit of his careful work.

As a storyteller, it's helpful to engage this same clarity, especially when it comes time to edit your story. You're already well into your process. You're already committed. You're probably a little fatigued. And you've got a lot of decisions to make before this thing is finished. Before you jump in, ask yourself, what do I want my audience to experience? What's powerful, true, and beautiful here? Where am I headed and what do we need in order to get there? What's my vision and what's my plan?

Post-production is about shaping a story for your audience through subtraction, addition and assembly. What needs to be edited (subtracted) from the story for clarity and brevity? What needs to be added to the story for tone and effect? And how do you assemble the story piece by piece, pacing it in a way that draws people in and moves them powerfully? Just like interviewing, editing is more of an art than a science. It blends technique and trial-and-error. And the only way to get better at it is to do a lot of it.

### *GETTING ORGANIZED AND READY*

Start by getting as organized as possible, assuring that you can find what you need when you need it. If you're editing a film, I highly suggest organizing all of your media on one hard drive or computer. Nothing kills a creative idea as quickly as trying to find that one stupid file that you were sure was on that other hard drive. While you're at it, maybe consider straightening up your workspace. Mentally, this helps create space for creative problem solving, which is essentially what editing is.



## WHAT TO TAKE AWAY

Take time to listen through the story you've recorded. I suggest you don't watch it or take notes yet. Instead, close your eyes and listen to the entire thing. You want to create something that resonates deeply with your audience. Quiet down and respond to what you hear. Better yet, ask God what He wants you to know about the story you're about to shape in your edit. Let Him start guiding your creative process.

Once you've listened through your story, identify one theme you want your audience to hear and resonate with above all else. Write that down in a sentence. (It helps me to use note cards.) Then go back and listen through your story again, writing down a theme sentence for each section of your narrative structure – exposition, inciting incident, rising tension, moment of truth, falling tension, resolution. An example might be:

Exposition – *Jeremy struggled with anger ever since he was a child.*

Inciting Incident – *He got a call one night that his father was taken to the ER.*

Rising Tension – *His dad was unconscious. He started to blame God.*

And so on. This might seem tedious, but it'll pay off by keeping you clear about your vision and plan. Seeing themes emerge will help you begin to pull together the story you want your audience to experience. Writing this down helps you visualize the narrative structure of the story so you can start editing for clarity, figuring out what to keep and what to leave out.

Now you can begin editing your interview, using your notes to help you break the interview into sections. As you start to re-assemble the portions of your interview, make sure you create a natural conversational flow. This is always a balancing act, especially as you decide which 'uhhs' and 'umms' to keep or toss. The end result should sound natural, clear, and unhurried.

It's also important to make sure your story actually makes sense as you reassemble it. At this point, you know much more about the story than your audience will. Step away from your edit every once in a while, take a break, then come back and watch it with fresh eyes. Try things out. Rearrange different portions of your interview for clarity. Ask someone you trust to watch or listen to the story and give you feedback.

The last point is this – hang in there. Editing is problem solving, and it's a lot of mental work. You're focusing on hundreds of little details while keeping the big picture. You're chipping away piece by piece, as if you're searching for the sculpture within the rock. It's normal to get tired, feel frustrated, to hit a wall. When you reach that point, give yourself a break. Take a quick walk or a power nap to reset. Keep after it and finish strong. You're doing the important work of connecting your story to your audience.

## WHAT TO ADD

Now comes the fun part. If you're editing a film, adding visuals and music will increase the production value of your story, just like spices and sauces add flavor to food. And just like spices and sauces, there's such a thing as too much, and such a thing as too little. The supporting elements of visuals and music should serve your story, draw in your audience, and help hold their attention as your story unfolds.

## ADDING VISUALS

Some storytellers focus a lot on visuals to create a story for their audiences to watch, even as they listen to an interview. When this is done well, it can be a beautiful and even poetic way of drawing someone into a story. Beautifully shot footage tends to pique our curiosity in the same way that art or photography does. To use visuals effectively in an edit, it's important to



understand sequence, pacing and juxtaposition.

Sequence has to do with the order of your shots. Just as words are ordered into sentences, shots are ordered into sequences, helping to tell a visual story. Depending on your story, it usually helps to film shots in a sequence and to edit shots in a sequence. It's up to you how you order your shots. You can even intentionally put things out of order for a specific effect. The main idea is that visuals should serve your story.

Pacing has to do with how quickly or slowly your shots are cut together. Again, there's plenty of creative freedom here. Quicker pacing can build energy and tends to increase tension. Longer, slower pacing can draw an audience in and help them focus. (This is especially helpful if you have a lot of edits in your interview and don't want things to feel rushed.) Again, allow your pacing to serve your story.

Juxtaposition has to do with how your visuals interact with your story. In other words, what effect do you intend your visuals to have and where should you place them in your edit? Filmmakers use this principle in very different ways. Some prefer to use visuals as a way of giving hints and impressions, much like a painter would do. This abstract approach creates more mystery and can be an effective way of keeping an audience visually interested, wondering what's coming next. Other filmmakers are more literal, preferring a documentary-style approach to their visuals, showing exactly what the story is referring to. Each approach can be effective as long as it serves the story well.

When you're filming B-roll for your story, there's plenty to consider in terms of locations, lighting and gear. While you're planning your shoots, it's a great idea to create a mood board before you head out. A mood board is a collection of still photos that capture the look and feel of what you intend to film. Find photos that have elements that you want to emulate - mood, framing, color, tone - and then bring them with you on your shoot.

## *ADDING MUSIC*

An effective score is one of the most important and powerful elements you can add to a film during your edit. Music sets the emotional tone for everything in your story, and it sends a lot of nonverbal signals to your audience about how to respond to it. If your story is serious, the right musical score can add a sense of weight and importance to what you're sharing. If you're telling a more lighthearted story, music can give your audience permission to let down their guard and enjoy it.

Music can also be a way of stylizing your story to make it fit within your church culture. If your worship style is more band-driven and contemporary, it might make more sense to use a score with ambient guitars and pads. If your worship style is more traditional or classical, maybe a solo piano or strings is a better way to go. This is just a suggestion. Don't overthink it. Just realize that music is a powerful way of emotionally connecting your story with your audience. Music can either distract people or it can draw them in.

Take the time to choose your score carefully. If you're working with a composer or a songwriter to score your project, discuss what you want your audience to experience. If you need to license existing music for your project, we recommend three great websites - The Music Bed ([musicbed.com](http://musicbed.com)), Marmoset Music ([marmosetmusic.com](http://marmosetmusic.com)) and Art List ([art-list.io](http://art-list.io)).

## *PUTTING IT TOGETHER*

Once you've got all your elements together - your interview, visuals and music - it's time to start assembling them. As you do this, understand that filmmaking is a layered art form. Writing is the art of words. Photography is the art of visuals. Music is the art of sound. Filmmaking uses all of these art forms in layers.



Because of this, some film editors trust their ears when they assemble a project – how does this sound? Other editors trust their eyes – how does this look? Others trust their gut instinct – how does this feel? These are all good questions to ask as you layer your elements together. Just as a chef considers taste, texture and temperature in his dish, you have to consider how your project sounds, looks and feels.

Since I’m a musician, I tend to edit with my ears. I trust my ears and I pay attention to what I’m hearing. Then I tend to assemble the other elements based on what I think sounds good. I know other filmmakers that have a highly refined visual sense, much higher than mine. They can instantly see when something is working and when it isn’t, so they use their eyes as their “way in” to assembling their edit. I also know storytellers who have what I call a big-picture gut instinct. They just know when they’re on the right track or not.

Chances are, you have your own “way in” to assembling your edit, based on a strength you bring to the table. Lean on your instincts as you make decisions. This is one of your biggest personal contributions to the story you’re telling.

## *GET SOMETHING TO WORK*

Editing is now a non-linear process, which means you don’t have to start assembling your story from beginning to end. Of course you can if you want to. But sometimes it’s not clear how to start a film or what will pique your audience’s interest. I’ve wasted an enormous amount of edit time trying to figure this out first.

I’ve found that it can be more creatively interesting (and effective) to start the process by building one or two powerful moments within the story and get them working. Even if it’s just a 15 or 20 second clip, get that moment to work well with your interview, visuals and music. This becomes something you can build up to. Then you can start working things out in the moments before and after. Sometime it just helps to get something to work.

## *MIXING AND GRADING*

Once you’ve completed your edit, it’s time to mix your audio and color-grade your footage. These are two processes that help unify and stylize the look and sound of your project.

An effective audio mix increases clarity and reduces distractions from a story. Creating an audio mix involves taking simultaneous tracks of dialogue, music and other sound design (if any) and combining them into a stereo mix for clarity and intended effect. High quality audio is extremely important to any film. The better the audio quality, the more likely your audience will engage with your story.

Your non-linear editing (NLE) software includes powerful tools for you to create an effective mix. The three main elements of an audio mix are level (how loud or soft the audio is), panning (stereo mapping your audio), and EQ (shaping your audio by increasing and reducing certain frequencies). In addition to tools for audio mixing, most NLE software will also include tools to improve poor audio, including the reduction of unwanted background noise.

Color grading allows your project to have a consistent and stylized look across all your footage. Again, your NLE software will have a basic solution for color correction and grading. You can also find more advanced color-grading software, such as DaVinci Resolve, for more sophisticated-looking results.

The edit is a storyteller's moment of truth, a discovery process of trial-and-error that connects a story to your audience. Don’t let the details overwhelm you. Keep a clear vision and a clear plan, and keep moving forward with it. It'll take everything you've got to make it come to life. And your audience will benefit from the time and effort you invest into this process.



# EDITING CHECKLIST

NAME OF YOUR STORY:

---

MAX EDITED RUNNING TIME:

---

## GET ORGANIZED & READY

- ☐ Organize your media files in one place.
- ☐ Clearly label your files and folders for easy access.
- ☐ Clear your workspace.

## WHAT TO TAKE AWAY

- ☐ Listen through your story.
- ☐ Write down one main theme you want your audience to hear and resonate with:
- ☐ Write a theme sentence to describe each part of your story:
  - Exposition** - Who's the character?
  - Inciting Incident** - What went wrong?
  - Rising Tension** - How did things fall apart?
  - Moment of Truth** - How did God step in?
  - Falling Tension** - What began to change?
  - Resolution** - What's the moral of this story?

## ADDING VISUALS

Describe the emotional tone you want to set in your visuals:

---

Describe the pace of your story (slow / steady / quick / energetic, etc.):

---

## ADDING MUSIC

Describe the emotional tone you want to set in your musical score:

---

## PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Describe how you want your story to sound:

---

Describe how you want your story to look:

---

Describe how you want your audience to feel when they watch your story:

---

## MIXING AND GRADING

- ☐ Create an audio mix for clarity and effect.
- ☐ Color-grade your footage for style and consistency.



### Focus

The final three chapters of this book are meant to explore storytelling on multiple platforms and art forms. Though we mostly think of videos when we think of storytelling in the church, this is beginning to change. More churches are embracing opportunities to share written stories, photo stories, and narrated stories in either a recorded or live format.

In order to share stories effectively on multiple platforms, it helps to understand how these art forms are designed to work. Watching a film is a different experience than thumbing through a website or a bulletin. Each art form we'll discuss has its own strengths and challenges. And each platform is designed to connect with an audience in different ways.

These final chapters are designed to be quick and practical, offering some context, practical tips and helpful resources for your project. Our goal is to help you focus your story effectively for the platform you plan to use.

When we talk about storytelling on film, we're mostly talking about documentary filmmaking. Some stories work easily in this kind of cinematic format, and others honesty do not. If you have a say in your selection process, it's important to use discernment before pursuing a story to be filmed.

Stories on film work best when the subject (interviewee) is compelling to watch. They need to be able to convey emotion and honesty. This means that you're not just looking for a compelling story, you're looking for a compelling subject to tell the story. This might mean that the story is told by someone we wouldn't typically expect to hear from – like an ex-convict, a disabled person, or someone who has lived through extreme challenges. Or it might be an ordinary person who has experienced God at work, and is able to share it in a compelling way. Your audience should be able to relate to them and root for them.

Filmed stories also work best when there's some visual aspect that can be captured. Visuals help create a sense of place and time. They can illustrate what transformation looks like. They can evoke deep emotional responses. Visuals can create their own narrative in service of the larger story, adding beauty to truth. Filmmaking is the art form that allows for this to happen, and it can be very effective for your audience when it's done well.

### MAKING FILMS

Filmmaking is an art form that assumes a captive audience. In fact, if you're making films to be shown in a church service, you're one of the few filmmakers today with the advantage of a built-in audience for your work. The lights go down, the film starts, and people take it all in. And even when people watch your film on a much smaller screen – usually their phone or laptop – the principle of a captive audience still stands. People will generally focus on a film.

This means that, as a filmmaker, you have your audience's time and attention. It's important to steward these well, because they are rare gifts. You have an incredible opportunity to take your church on a journey through storytelling, to unfold God's powerful truth and amazing beauty during the course of the next few minutes. How do you want to approach this? What truth do you want people to hear? What beauty do you want people to see?

The good news is that, as a filmmaker, you have a full range of storytelling elements at your disposal. As we discussed in the previous chapter, filmmaking is a layered art form. Telling stories effectively on film means combining and finessing the elements you have – interviews, visuals and music – to create a film that moves people.



## INVESTMENT

This probably goes without saying, but let me say it anyway. Filmmaking is the most costly kind of storytelling in terms of equipment, expertise, time and effort. It might be easier to make a film today than it ever has been. But let's be honest, it's never been that easy to make a film, and it likely never will be.

This is because good filmmaking is so much more than the mechanical steps of shooting, editing and rendering. It's working in multiple art forms (visual narrative, spoken narrative and music) to tell an intentional, clear and focused story. Everything – from preproduction to location to lens choice to camera movements to lighting to audio capture to editing to color grading and music choice – can either serve your story or pull people away from it.

It requires a lot of skill and patience to get all these pieces working together in a compelling narrative. And it takes all our effort and imagination to defy gravity and get our story airborne, so to speak. The more films you make, the more you will begin to hone your craft and find your unique voice, telling compelling stories for your church.

A lot of times in the church, we hear the word “just” used a lot when it comes to creating videos. “Can we just put together a quick 90-second video? We just need a few short stories filmed for this Sunday.” We've tried our best to ban the word “just” from existence. (We're still working on this, it's a slow process.)

But we've also intentionally started using the word “film” instead of “video” to describe what we're creating. This isn't an attempt to be stuffy or artsy. We're not trying to elevate our work through terminology. We simply use it to describe the investment required to create something effective, substantial and powerful. The word “filmmaking” carries the weight of serious effort, the kind that's required to create a substantial piece of art. Stories on film need this kind of effort and skill, because well-made films create impact.

## TEAM EFFORT

One of the most important principles of filmmaking is that it nearly always works better as a team. Because this craft involves so many detailed steps and processes, it helps to share the load. And having fresh eyes on your projects is a great way to make your films more effective.

For example, if you bring in an editor who wasn't part of your filming process, he or she might have sharper insight on what will connect with your audience. This is because they're seeing and hearing everything for the first time, and they're not hindered by an over-familiarity with your story. They'll likely think of things that hadn't occurred to you.

Adding a Director of Photography (DP) is an obvious way of elevating the quality of your film. This can allow you to focus on the content of your story while someone else is solely focused on shooting beautiful footage that adds visual impact to your project. Collaborating with a composer or a songwriter is another way to add artistic value to your film.

As storytellers in the church, we often have to be generalists. It's important for us to know how to light a scene, film a scene, conduct an interview, shoot B-roll, edit a sequence, pick music and color grade our footage. We can even get pretty good at most of these processes on our own, just because things have to get done quickly.

Someone actually came up with a term for a person who produces, shoots and edits all their own work – a shreditor. This is someone who handles every process from start to finish. Though shredding is possible and sometimes necessary, I don't recommend it as a long-term solution. I worked this way for years and learned everything the hard way.

If I'm honest, when I look back at those projects today, I see how homemade many of my efforts actually were. When I started pulling a team around me, I started falling in love with storytelling all over again.



You know your resources and your schedule. You might have the option of hiring in professionals to work on your project. You might be on your own with zero resources. Either way, I encourage you to be intentional about adding team members to your film crew. This can be a great opportunity for mentoring and discipleship, allowing someone to use their gifts to tell stories.

Adding people to cover specific filmmaking roles takes time and discernment, especially if you're working with volunteers. The wrong person on your crew can cause a big headache. But you will learn what works and what doesn't as you begin building a filmmaking team. As you grow your team, you'll grow in your capacity to tell stories that impact your church.

## RESOURCES

There are excellent online resources to train you and your team in the craft and processes of filmmaking. From lighting to gear to editing tips and everything in between, these will help you sharpen your skills as a storyteller and coach the team around you.

Our website has a full list of resources our team uses, available at [tellmorestories.co/resources](https://tellmorestories.co/resources). Below are some of our favorites sites.

### **STORY & HEART ACADEMY**

[storyandheart.com/academy](https://storyandheart.com/academy)

*Video tutorials on filmmaking, including courses for one-person teams*

### **SKILLSHARE**

[skillshare.com/classes/film](https://skillshare.com/classes/film)

*Video training in filmmaking*

### **CREATIVE LIVE**

[creativelive.com/photography](https://creativelive.com/photography)

*Online classes in filmmaking*

### **THE BEAT**

[premiumbeat.com/blog](https://premiumbeat.com/blog)

*Free video production blog*



## STORYTELLING IN WORDS AND IMAGES

### Focus

In this chapter, we'll take a look at two platforms of storytelling that often coexist: creative writing and photography. Of course, each of these is a complete art form without the other. A compelling photograph is worth at least a thousand words. And a thousand compelling words can paint a picture more vividly than a photographer ever could.

What these two art forms have in common is their ability to make an audience think, instead of simply reacting. When we watch a film, there's often so much happening at once that an audience is just trying to take it all in. Films are designed to be fully experienced. All the work is already done for an audience.

In contrast, written storytelling is a much more limited art form. You have to draw on vocabulary and sentence structure to build the story and pique an audience's interest. The audience may or may not be captive, depending on how you draw them into a story early on. We live in a bullet-point culture of information. If an audience is not invested in a story within the first paragraph or two, they'll quickly move on to something else.

Photography is also a more limited art form than film. Whereas filmmaking draws an audience in over a progression of time, photos tend to focus on one single thing in a single shot – a face, a reaction, an emotional tone or a mood. Compelling photos catch people's attention. They're designed to make a point, to stick with an audience and leave a memorable impression.

One of the most influential and effective examples of written and photo storytelling is Brandon Stanton's wildly popular Facebook page, Humans of New York. Brandon is a photographer who lost his job and, with his newfound spare time, set out to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers for a new project. As he started his work, he realized that the interactions he was having and the stories he was hearing were far more interesting than the photos themselves. He slowed down, spent time getting to know his subjects, and captured their stories as he photographed them.

Humans of New York has created its own kind of storytelling movement, inspiring hundreds of Humans of ... photo projects around the world. This is partly because Brandon's style of storytelling documents faces in a crowd, single moments in time, impressions that hint at a larger narrative. Audiences are drawn in because they're intrigued and they want to know more. They're getting the chance to meet someone new, someone with something to say. This is what storytelling can do through words and images.

### Words

Even though we often associate stories with imagery, we still live in an age of the written word. Consider how often you write each day between emails, texts and social media posts. We've become accustomed to connecting and communicating what's important to us through writing.

When it comes to sharing written stories in a church, one of the most important considerations is whether the story will be written in first-person or third-person narrative. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. Writing stories in first-person narrative is what I would call confessional storytelling. This is a written story of what happened, a testimony from the point of view of the person who experienced it. For an audience, this can be a very compelling story to read, as long as it's



told well in its raw form. But for a storyteller, it can get tricky if the story needs editing or paraphrasing, which most stories do.

The third-person narrative approach is what I would call journalistic storytelling. For a storyteller, this allows you to take the details of a person's story and create a story arc, much like a narrator would. It gives you more flexibility to share the story in a creative and compelling way, adding in direct quotes from the subject of the story. For an audience, this can also be compelling as long as it's narrated effectively. If not, the story can come off dry and formulaic.

Whatever approach you use, it's important to maintain the honesty of the story and the integrity of the person that it's about. It helps to lead off with a compelling hook, a quote or a paragraph that captures the reader's attention. And it's essential to demonstrate how God impacted the story, explaining it in a way that a reader can't miss.

When you're writing a story, consider your audience. Who will be reading this? Where will they read it - online, in a bulletin, on a display in the lobby? How much time will people spend reading your story? We live in an age of information overload. Most people are busy, so if they're reading it online, it helps if your stories are sharp and succinct. If you're able to publish it in a booklet or a magazine, you can write longer-form stories.

If you're not a writer, consider recruiting one (or a few). And while you're at it, considering recruiting a few editors as well. These are great roles for volunteers in your church (and English teachers make great editors. When in doubt, cut it out.) Find examples of written stories you like, and then figure out why they're effective. Find a style of writing that works for your church.

We look for writers who understand our three essential elements - the God Element, the Family Element, and the Me-Too Element. We're looking for stories that clearly show God at work, resonate with our culture, and relate with as many people as possible. And we're looking for these things in balance when we look for writers. A story isn't a lesson in systematic theology. It's a personal narrative where God transforms a situation.

It's also important create a schedule that allows your writers and editors to craft new written stories on a regular basis. It took our team a while to figure out a good rhythm for this. This is because our Communications Team doesn't do a lot of publications. We don't currently print bulletins or publish magazines. So we had to find a rhythm that worked for us. For our volunteer team members, we give about a month from start to finish on a written story. For staff, it can be a much quicker turnaround.

## IMAGES

Still photography is another great way to capture personal stories. Our team captures portraits of each story we record. Some of these end up on our website, others end up on Facebook or on the storytelling display in our lobby. The point of these photos is to capture something honest and beautiful about the person whose story we're sharing. We want to catch people's eyes and draw them into a story about the goodness of God.

If we're able to display a series of multiple photos, then we allow those photos to tell a story in progression, with a mixture of wider establishing shots and closer detail shots. If we can only use a single photo, we try to focus on one personal portrait that conveys the tone of the story we're sharing. Or if the story takes place in a unique visual setting, we might use a photo to capture the setting instead.

Just as with filmed B-roll, portraits can either be abstract or specific, mysterious or obvious. They can be used as art or as documentary photojournalism. And just like film, there's a science and an art to great photography. The most effective photos will be the ones that capture the true essence of your story.

If you're looking to capture a certain style, a visit to a bookstore or a Google image search is often all that's needed to find your inspiration. Whichever style you choose for your photos, they should serve as a visual invitation for your audience to connect with the story.



# RESOURCES

Our website has a full list of resources our team uses, available at [tellmorestories.co/resources](http://tellmorestories.co/resources). Below are some of our favorites sites.

## CREATIVE WRITING

### SKILLSHARE

[skillshare.com/classes/creative-writing](http://skillshare.com/classes/creative-writing)

*Video training in creative writing*

### AP STYLEBOOK

[apstylebook.com](http://apstylebook.com)

*Grammar and punctuation style guide from the Associated Press*

## PHOTOGRAPHY

### CREATIVE LIVE

[creativelive.com/photography](http://creativelive.com/photography)

*Online classes in photography*

### LYNDA

[lynda.com/photography](http://lynda.com/photography)

*Foundations of photography courses*

### HUMANS OF NEW YORK

[humansofnewyork.com](http://humansofnewyork.com)

*Photo essays of everyday New Yorkers*



# LISTEN

Chapter 9

## STORYTELLING THROUGH NARRATION

### FOCUS

At its root, storytelling is a spoken tradition that's been around as long as human beings have. A lot of recent research points to the idea that story is the true language of the human brain, our primary mechanism for processing information and making sense of our lives. The stories we hear tend to frame up the way we see the world. The stories we tell are a way of communicating what matters to us, what we've experienced, and what it means.

It's no surprise then that a majority of the Bible is written in narrative form. Jesus taught about the Kingdom of Heaven by telling stories and parables. Storytelling is the central way we share what God has done in our lives, reminding ourselves of His faithfulness and proclaiming the Gospel to the people around us.

There's a story in Luke 8 about Jesus healing a man possessed by demons. It's one of the most vivid healing stories in the Bible. The man was homeless, ran around town with no clothes on, and slept in a graveyard. When Jesus casts out the man's demons, He sends them into a herd of pigs that proceed to run off a cliff and drown in a lake. It's a pretty crazy story, one that freaked out everyone who saw what happened.

The man, now healed and in his right mind, wants to stay with Jesus. But Jesus sends him away and says, "'Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.' And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him." Jesus commissions this man as a Gospel storyteller – a living, breathing example of deliverance and freedom.

Another story in John 9 recounts the healing of a man born blind. After Jesus restores his sight, people begin to realize what happened. This time they're not frightened, they're excited. It's enough of a new item to get the attention of the religious leaders, who drag the man in for questioning. They demand to know how this happened and whether the man thinks Jesus was a sinner, able to do this miracle. The man's response is one of the most honest testimonies in the Bible. "Whether He is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

This is heart of sharing our faith. We tell others what God has done in our lives. And although we live in a highly technological age, some of the most compelling and life-changing stories we encounter are the ones we hear. Films can be compelling to watch. Photos can catch our eye. Written words can make us stop and think. But Scripture tells us that faith comes by hearing.

In the church, spoken and narrated stories are nothing new, and yet audio stories are enjoying a big comeback in our culture, thanks to the popularity of podcasting, apps like StoryCorps, and radio shows like *The Moth* and *This American Life*. Though filmmaking is usually the preferred method of storytelling in churches, audio storytelling can be a very impactful way to share personal testimonies.

### VOICE

As with written stories, you have the option of sharing an audio story from a first-person point of view, asking someone to tell what happened to them. Or you can narrate the story from a third-person point of view, summarizing it as a storyteller. Again, there are similar advantages and disadvantages to each approach when it comes to audio stories.



It's generally more compelling to hear someone share their own story. This approach is more of a confessional method of sharing. But as a storyteller, you're limited to the actual words a person shares. You can't add or rephrase anything. What you get is what you've got. Narrating the story in a third-person, journalistic format gives you more creative freedom to interpret and summarize the story. But this also means that you have the full responsibility of effectively sharing events that happened to someone else.

If you're considering a story that you want to share via audio, think about the sound of the voice that will be sharing it. Is that voice compelling? Is it believable? Alex Blumberg argues that audio storytelling demands more emotional honesty than any other platform. This is because there's no imagery, no footage, only words. The story has to ring true for us to believe what we're hearing. If we don't believe it, we won't engage with it.

In addition to being honest, the story needs to be descriptive and engaging. Audio stories require an audience to visualize what's happening as the story is being told. Allow your story to paint a picture of what happened, transporting the audience into each scene of conflict and resolution.

## AUDIO

A few years, I was in Austin for a discipleship conference with several other pastors from our church. The conference was hosted by the Austin Stone Community Church. And during the breaks, while I was on the hunt for coffee, I kept seeing signs all around the building inviting people to share their story. That afternoon, outside the building, I saw an Airstream van, decked out with a makeshift recording studio inside. A small crowd of people was gathered around the van, all waiting to step inside and share their story. This was a light bulb moment for me.

Steven Bush, who oversees the Austin Stone Story Team, explained how much easier it is to capture and share audio stories than stories on film. There's less pressure, no lights or cameras, just a story and a microphone. And from an editing standpoint, the process moves along much more quickly.

We took this idea back to our church and begin capturing dozens of stories from our people. Audio stories are now a central part of our storytelling ministry. For us, the interview process for audio works in a similar way to interviews on film. We edit our audio stories to a similar running time as our films and post them online.

We've found that audio stories are ideal for training new editors. We've also discovered that audio stories, combined with a series of still photographs, can quickly be turned into short documentary-style films. This can be a simple, understated and effective alternative, especially if you don't have the time or resources to create a fully produced film. Sometimes, artistic restraint can be much more powerful than over-visualizing a story.

## STORY TIME

Of course, stories don't have to be recorded to be effective. Live narration is storytelling in its most raw and real form. And doing this in community can be an extremely powerful experience.

When I launched our Story Team at WoodsEdge, my vision was to foster a culture of storytelling at our church. We had been telling stories on film for years, but I wanted our people to begin taking hold of the power of storytelling themselves. As I mentioned before, we are a passionate church that loves to see God at work. I wanted stories of God's goodness to permeate the atmosphere.

As we started meeting with our Story Team, I asked each team member to write out their own story and share it with the group. It was important that they experience what it feels like to open up and be vulnerable. This would help them know how to walk



other people through the same process. I did it myself along with our team leaders.

Some of us felt like we didn't really have much of a story. Or if we had one, that it wasn't all that great. By engaging in this process, we experienced firsthand what most people feel about their own stories – that they don't matter.

We started meeting every month around a meal to hear 3 or 4 stories. After each person shared, I asked the team to speak back what they had heard, what they loved, and what they thought was powerful. This had a surprising and life-giving impact on each one of us who shared. Each person's vulnerability was met with encouragement and support. We got the chance to see how much our stories matter to the people around us. The room felt deeply connected in a holy sort of way.

We began to realize something about storytelling. For us, it isn't only a craft. It's a ministry. And it's something we eagerly started sharing with other groups around us. This has led to a series of Story Nights in our church, where our team walks people through the process of sharing their testimony, and then hosts a storytelling evening for their community. After people share, we encourage the community around them to speak back what impacted them about the story.

I used to think of live testimonies as an open mic night for the church. And I've seen too many open mic opportunities go downhill fast. If you had asked me a few years ago if live storytelling was a good idea, I'd have probably said no. But once we started applying the same kinds of intentionality to live storytelling events that we were using in filmmaking, writing and photography, it started to connect. I can honestly say that we're in awe at how God is using this in our church. It may be the most impactful thing our team does.

Whether you're sharing audio stories in third-person or first-person, in a live setting or recorded platform, use the same intentionality, clarity and focus to draw out what's true and beautiful about a person's story. Find the emotional honesty, then connect that story to the audience.

## RESOURCES

Our website has a full list of resources our team uses, available at [tellmorestories.co/resources](https://tellmorestories.co/resources). Below are some of our favorites sites.

### AUDIO RECORDING TIPS

[premiumbeat.com/blog/recording-better-narration](https://premiumbeat.com/blog/recording-better-narration)

*A how-to guide for capturing great sounding audio*

### ALEX BLUMBERG COURSE

[creativelive.com/courses/power-your-podcast-storytelling-alex-blumberg](https://creativelive.com/courses/power-your-podcast-storytelling-alex-blumberg)

*An authoritative study on the power of spoken stories*

### AUSTIN STONE STORY TEAM PODCAST

[storyteam.org/podcast](https://storyteam.org/podcast)

*Weekly podcast of Gospel stories*



# NOW WHAT?

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## *COURAGE, PATIENCE & PERSISTANCE*

I hope this book has been helpful to you, giving you practical steps and thought processes for what you're setting out to do. We've covered a lot of ground here, but don't be overwhelmed by all the info. Use this resource in any way that helps you.

Mark Twain once said, "The key to getting ahead is getting started." If you're ready to grow as a storyteller, it's essential for you to take steps that move you forward. As you become more intentional, clear and focused, you'll become a more effective storyteller.

Again, there's no substitute for experience and hard work. Storytelling is a big investment, and it's nearly always a labor of love. But it's one that has the potential to change lives. As you consider what's next, here's my encouragement to you.

First, be courageous as a storyteller. Take risks in your work. Try things you haven't seen before. It takes courage to pursue an idea without knowing for sure if it will work. Pursue your ideas anyway. Work on projects you believe in. Communicate what God has placed on your heart. And do it boldly.

Second, be patient as a storyteller. Stories are human. They're about people's lives, and people's lives are messy. Stories take time to tell, even when time is the one thing you don't have. Patience is essential to good listening. It's essential to good storytelling. And it's essential to creating a meaningful connection with your audience.

Last but not least, be persistent in your work. Hang in there. You're learning something new with every story you tell. And you get to take that wisdom and insight into your next project. Perseverance pays off over the long haul. I promise it does. If you're called to be a storyteller, resist the urge to give it up. Keep doing great work and telling the stories we need to hear.

God bless you!

*BRIAN*





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