

10 Minute Stories

A Foundational Tool for Communities

As communities initially form there is often a desire to get to the “community stuff” as quickly as possible. While this desire is understandable, communities are formed of individuals, each with a unique story which has shaped their being. These stories do not go away when we form community with one another, rather they form a foundation for the story we will embark on together, a communal story which itself is situated within a bigger foundational story: “Remember when we were slaves in Egypt...”

While, community (and the Gospel) calls us to a life of interdependence with one another and with God, we are each uniquely gifted and called. It is out of this individuation that we discover our deep need for others. Healthy community never promotes sameness, rather we celebrate our distinctive gifts as we learn to submit to the Christ uniquely manifest in one another.

**For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.**

Psalm 139:13-14

A starting point for learning about one another is to spend time briefly sharing each of our stories with our community.

Parameters

Why 10 minutes? 10 minutes requires us to focus on the handful of key events that have made us who we are. It's true that there are innumerable factors, but the time limit forces each person to reflect on key life-impacting events that have formed their being. The goal isn't a deep and exhaustive personal history, rather an introductory sketch that provides entry points for deeper conversations and understanding.

A 10 minute story is NOT a litany of facts, places, churches, or people, though these things will certainly emerge.

Every part of your story should contribute to answering the question, “What are the key experiences that have deeply impacted who I am and how?” Examples include: “I never knew my father,” “My family only communicated through yelling,” “My church community gave me a deep love of justice,” “For as long as I can remember I wanted to become the President,” “The year I spent in Cambodia changed everything,” and “I took a class called Kingdom of God in America that completely changed my understanding of God.”

Spend time preparing to tell your story. Meditate on the question. Share in the mirror. Make sure that it takes only 10 minutes to tell. Seek to not use notes if at all possible. Do NOT read your story. Practice telling your story before sharing it with the group (don't worry; it's something you will use again and again.)

Create a safe space by being attentive and minding your body language (no eye rolling, etc.) Take care not to tease or make fun of shared vulnerabilities either during the story or after.

When you gather to tell your stories have someone keep time. Let everyone know the signals and count down the time for the person (as cares best for them). Allow a little time after the 10 minutes for others to ask questions starting with strictly informational questions and then, if time allows, others (how, what, when, where, would you describe, but NOT why).

A 10 minute story is only the beginning of sharing stories with one another. It's an entry point for further conversations. As you listen, think of things you would like to ask the person later. Continually encourage one another to more deeply share their stories, hopes, dreams, disappointments, and feelings as you continue your life together.

A helpful resource is the chapter on Love Mapping from *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by John Gottman. While the book's context is marriage, the tools it provides are great for all kinds of relationships be they friendships, family, church, or community.