



STORY

SMALL GROUP LEADERS GUIDE





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Curriculum Overview

This “Story” Curriculum is designed for you to reflect on your story. Over the next 6 weeks we want you to take a look at your life through the lens of Saul’s/Paul’s spiritual transformation...from a man named Saul who once hunted down and killed Christians to a man who not only changed his name to Paul but whose life was transformed by Jesus. By the end of this study you should be able to say with confidence, “This is MY STORY of how following JESUS made a difference in my life.”

General Background of Paul:

The Apostle Paul is known worldwide as one of the greatest Christian missionaries. He wrote much of the New Testament. His abrupt turnaround from zealous persecutor of Christians to one of Christianity’s greatest proponents helped shape the history of the early Christian church. Saul of Tarsus was born in approximately AD 5-10 in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia (modern day Turkey) to Jewish parents who possessed Roman citizenship. He later moved to Jerusalem where he grew up and trained in the Hebrew Scriptures under Rabbi Gamaliel. He became a member of the Pharisees in Jerusalem and had unrelenting zeal and a fiery temperament toward heresy. He was a tent maker by trade. He died at the hands of Emperor Nero in Rome around AD 64-65 after traveling around much of the Mediterranean world sharing the good news of Jesus.



Week 1

Theme Night Ideas: Chili cook off or Hot Soup Night

Icebreaker: What was the first concert you attended? What was the most recent one you attended?

Basic Life Background

Scriptural Background:

We will be tracking through Saul's/Paul's spiritual transformation...from a man named Saul who once hunted down and killed Christians to a man who not only changed his name to Paul but whose life was transformed by Jesus.

READ Acts 22:1-3 as an arrested Paul explains to a crowd in Ephesus his "life background". Saul came from a very religious background and was trained by one of the most respected Jewish rabbis. This helped set the stage for who we was.

Big Idea: Part of who you are and where you came from begin to make up "your story". Take time in your group to share each your "life background" with each other. The questions below will serve as a guide to help you get started. Try to let everyone share, but you may need to limit each person to about 5 minutes in order for everyone to participate. This exercise will also help the group get to know each other at a deeper level. Remember that parts of people's stories may be painful so please promote a sensitive environment where people can share freely and comfortably.

To develop your Story begin to dialogue about the questions below

Key Questions to Develop "My Story":

- Where have you come from?
- How did you grow up?
- What is your backstory?
- What are your roots?
- Pain, hurt, sin?
- Divorced family growing up?
- Long line of family struggle or blessings?



- Did you grow up in an open home where people talked about problems or in a quiet reserved home?
- Are there any parts of your story that are difficult to talk about or be honest about?

Notes:

Difference Maker Moment: Who sacrificed time and money to provide for you growing up? What challenges did your family face?

Luke 12:33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

My Story example:

My name is Ryan and this is MY STORY.

I moved around quite a bit when I was kid. I was born in KC, but our family moved to Denver when I was 5. It was there in Denver when I was 8 that my parents divorced. There was very little godly influence in our lives at that time...we just weren't a church going family. It was a tough time emotionally...but I had great parents. My mom was a strong, hardworking single mom and we learned to cope with our new normal. She remarried and a few years later when I was in 7th grade my mom and stepdad moved us back to KC where I survived by diving into sports and working hard at school.

My name is Christian, and this is MY STORY.

I had to be raised in one of the greatest places on planet earth; a little 2-stoplight town in the hills of Southern Ohio called "Bainbridge", it was actually called a 'village' and not a town it was so small. My dad was a principal and football coach, my mom worked at a school, and I was the middle brother of two sisters. Our community and life revolved around sports and the school. Sports was my identity, as the head football coach's and athletic director's son, but they were also what I loved, and where all my friends were. Football, baseball, basketball, whatever season it was was where you could find me almost every day of the week.



My Story Journal

Homework: Write out in a paragraph or two your story of how you grew up and key events that shaped you.

Prayer: Father, thank you for where I have come from and who you have made me to be. Help me to take those past experiences, some good and some painful, and use them for your glory. Let my past be used to help others. Amen

This is my story and how following Jesus made a difference in my life.



Week 2

Theme Night ideas: Pizza Night or Italian Night.

Icebreaker: If time were not an issue, what is your favorite hobby that you would like to do more?

He Saw a Light [Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13]

Acts 9:3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

Acts 22:6 About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me.

Acts 26:13 About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions.

Scriptural Background:

In Acts 9, 22, and 26 we see Saul's story of becoming a follower of Jesus. In Acts 9 he explains the event and in 22 and 26 he has the opportunity to share his story with a crowd in Ephesus and then to King Agrippa in Caesarea. In both cases where he is sharing his story he is under arrest for proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah (the Savior) and there are Jews trying to kill him. As we break down his story in Acts 9, 22 and 26 we see that it begins with a Light from Jesus that gets his attention.

Big Idea: Saul saw a Light and it caught his attention. Things weren't as he thought they were in life and what he had come to know. Perhaps some of his steadfast thoughts and experiences were suddenly shaken to the core. In that moment his eyes began to open to a truth that was different from what his background had taught him.

To develop your Story begin to dialogue about the questions below.

Key Questions to Develop "My Story":

- Your first understanding/interest in God (not salvation), but how you were shaped to understand God, that would later play a part in your salvation.
- Did you grow up in church?
- When did you first attend?



- Did you have any bad experiences that moved you away from God?
- Who do you look to who lived for God? Anyone?

Notes:

Difference Maker Moment: What impact have you seen in people’s lives by a person’s or an organization’s time and money?

Philippians 3:8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ.

My Story Examples:

RH-Toward the end of my senior year in high school my dad began a relationship with Jesus after another tough divorce. When my dad first talked to me about God I thought he had lost his mind because God and religion had not been much of our life growing up. God changed his life and he married a great Christian lady during my freshman year at Kansas State University. My dad and stepmom came to visit me at K-State and I began to see this real relationship with God that they had. This was the first exposure I had to someone who actually had a relationship with Jesus and wasn’t just religion. I began to see that there was a personal God and not just a distant God. I just didn’t necessarily want a relationship with that personal God at the time. My life had other priorities at the time.

CN-I was raised in a deeply committed Christian family. My grandpa was a pastor, my mom sang at church, my dad taught Sunday School. We were at church every Sunday of my life...and usually every Sunday night and Wednesday night too. Church and Christianity were a part of my D.N.A. by default, and I’m really grateful for that.

My Story Journal

Homework: Write out in a paragraph or two your story of how you first saw the light based on the questions above.

Prayer: Father, I know you care for me and love me so much that you exposed me to the truth of the Gospel. You love all people and desire to have a relationship with each of



them. Thank you for the light of Truth and the fact that it is always shining even if we are not yet responding to it. Amen

This is my story and how following Jesus made a difference in my life.



Week 3

Theme Night ideas: Mexican Fiesta Night. Break out the sombreros :).

Icebreaker ideas: Who is the most famous person you know or have met? How did it happen?

He Fell to the Ground [Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14]

Acts 9:4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Acts 22:7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

Acts 26:14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

Scriptural Background:

READ Acts 22:4-5 and Acts 26:9-11 as Paul shares his sinful background with the crowd. Trained as a devout Jewish Pharisee Paul took serious the task of hunting down, arresting and even killing those who were followers of Jesus. He even said that there were witnesses who could attest to his tenacity v.5.

Big Idea: The bright Light that had shown around Saul began to expose his shortcomings and sin. In that moment a lifetime of memories surely flooded his mind. Not only did he know that he was a sinner, no matter how hard he tried to follow the law perfectly, but now with the Light exposing and penetrating his heart he had to know how far short he fell from God's perfection. Saul fell to the ground in the presence of a Holy Jesus who alone was perfect. This event would bring Paul to a point of realizing his mistakes and his need for Jesus.

To develop your Story begin to dialogue about the questions below.

Key Questions to Develop "My Story":

- What events brought you to a point in your life where you realized you need Jesus?
- Was there anything missing that left you needing God?



- What developed mindsets did you have that you overcame to see your need for Jesus?
- What sin or habit were you bound by that caused you to realize you needed Jesus?
- What obstacle was in your way in life that caused you to stumble?

Notes:

Difference Maker Moment: What would you be willing to do or give up to see thousands more impacted for Jesus?

Matthew 19:21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

My Story Examples:

RH-Needless to say, without God I made many poor decisions. I got caught up in living to fulfill my own desires with girls and alcohol. I met and dated a wonderful girl named Heather who unfortunately wasn't treated right because of my poor decisions. My identity was being developed and I was taking pride in being the life of the party. The problem is....I just always woke up feeling empty and guilty about what I had done. After I graduated college, our Sigma Chi Fraternity Chapter Advisor named Bill helped me get my first job. Unfortunately I lived the same destructive way in the business world as I did in college until a coworker named Stan invited me to church.

CN- When I was 6, I took ownership of that Christian upbringing for the first time. After an evening church service at Wheelersburg Church of the Nazarene I understood for the first time that I was a sinner and that my sin deserved Hell. I realized that Jesus could forgive me and rescue me from my sin, but I knew I needed to ask him.

My Story Journal

Homework: Write out in a paragraph or two your story of what happened in your life to cause you to realize you needed Jesus. Use the questions above to guide your thoughts.

Prayer: Thank you that despite my past sins you love me and forgive me. Help me to live a renewed life and use my past to encourage others. Amen



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Week 4

Theme Night ideas: Baseball night and Ballpark food.

Icebreaker ideas: What are your two favorite summer activities? Why?

Saul Heard a Voice [Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14] and he found out who Jesus really was [Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15]

Acts 9:4-5 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

Acts 22:7-8 I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' 8 "Who are you, Lord?" I asked. "'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied.

Acts 26:14-15 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

Scriptural Background:

Read Acts 9:4-5 as Saul was finally listening to God. The bright light had got his attention but now he is finally listening. Over the years, God has most likely been trying to get Saul to listen to the truth of the scripture. Saul would never forget where God got his attention and he started listening. On a road near Damascus Saul said yes to Jesus.

Big Idea: Saul asked a question that everyone should ask, "Who are you, Lord?" The Bible is clear that if we will seek the Lord, we will find him. The answer to the question that Saul asked changed his life forever, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," he replied. It was a voice and a message that would cause him to know who Jesus really was and to give his life to Him.

To develop your Story begin to dialogue about the questions below.



Key Questions to Develop "My Story":

He Heard a Voice:

- Where were you when you heard the message communicated clearly that made you want to follow Jesus?
- Was it at an event or a church service?
- Who communicated that message of Jesus?
- What did you hear?

He found out who Jesus really was:

- This was your moment of salvation –How did that moment transpire?
- What was your reaction, decision, response to hearing who Jesus really was?
- How did you feel?
- What thoughts did you have that moment/that day?
- Did you come forward or pray on your own or fall on your knees?

Notes:

Difference Maker Moment: Who do you want to see reached with the Gospel?

1 Timothy 2:3-4 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

My Story Examples:

RH-Because my dad wouldn't give up on me....he had been encouraging me to find a church...I finally agreed to try it out with my longtime girlfriend Heather who I had somehow convinced that our relationship would be different after the 2nd break up. We went in January of 1997 and started to hear the Bible preached and we heard the Gospel. We heard the message of Romans 5:8...that even though we were sinners, Christ died for us. I had a real battle going on in my heart because I was still partying heavily at K-state and Westport. After a drunken couple of days in Manhattan in May of 1997 I ended up back at church that Sunday. I felt like God was saying to me "Ryan, you are throwing your life away and I have so much more planned for you."

RH-I remember standing in the service and just saying "take my life, I give it to you, I'm sorry for how I am living it, it is yours now".



CN- Scared to death that I might go to Hell, I told my Mom and Dad that I needed to ask Jesus to forgive me and to come into my life, and they knelt with me on the couch in our front room, overlooking this big picture window in this tiny little house that we were living in.

CN-I was only 6, but I remember praying to give my life to Jesus that night, and asking him to forgive me of my sin, and I remember it as if it was yesterday.

This moment became my faith journey for a long time. It was enough to believe that I wasn't going Hell when I died, for a little while. But eventually that knowledge didn't fill my soul.

I think I really realized the void when I started going to Fellowship of Christian Athletes football camps as a middle-schooler. That was the first place I heard I should live as a Christian, read my Bible, try not to sin, and to have influence for Jesus. Growing up in a small church that didn't have a youth pastor or youth ministry, FCA became my Youth Group.

Over the years I did learn who Jesus was, I did start feeling bad about my sin and I worked to live a life that stayed away from sin. I talked to my friends about Jesus and saw many of them become Christians, and I tried to use my influence to make Jesus proud. I wasn't totally all in, but I was definitely known as somebody who took their faith seriously.

Homework: Write out in a paragraph or two your story of where you were when you heard the Gospel and when it was that you became a follower of Jesus. Use the questions above to guide your thoughts.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the simple message of the Gospel. Thank you for the people you put in place to help communicate the truth in a way I could understand it and respond to your free gift of eternal life. Amen

This is my story and how following Jesus made a difference in my life.



Week 5

Theme Night ideas: Soup and Salad Night or BBQ dinner party

Icebreaker ideas: What are the one or two most exciting places you have visited?

Saul/Paul surrendered/committed his whole life to Jesus [Acts 22:10]

Acts 22:10 What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. "'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.'

Scriptural Background:

READ Acts 22:10 as Paul surrenders his life to the Lord and asks "What shall I do, Lord? Jesus directs him to Damascus while he is left blind for the next few days. I wonder what thoughts Paul wrestled with as he thought about his new life with Jesus? READ Galatians 1:23-24 as Paul discusses what people were saying about him now that he was a follower of Jesus.

Big Idea: Now known as Paul, he gave up everything to follow Jesus. His life as a Pharisee and a persecutor of those who followed Jesus was over. I imagine that those who financed his mission to kill Jesus' followers were not happy with his new found faith in the One he formally persecuted. This would not have been easy and would have brought many difficulties to his life. Paul surrendered his life to pursuing God's plan for his life. He was all in!

To develop your Story begin to dialogue about the questions below.

Key Questions to Develop "My Story":

- When did you get all in?
- When did you begin to leave your old life and step into the new one God had for you?
- Was this hard?
- What got left behind and what got added?
- What are you still working on?



Notes:

Difference Maker Moment: What fears have you overcome as you have grown in your faith? Work stress, financial, marital, kids, etc?

2 Timothy 1:7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

My Story Examples:

RH-I'd like to say that everything was different the next day, but I really struggled at first to live for God. My whole life was surrounded by actions and a lifestyle that led me to make many bad decisions. I was one foot in church and one foot in the world of struggle and temptation. My relationship with my Heather had to change dramatically because I was not the godly man she needed me to be and our relationship was based too much on a physical love. After several months of struggling we finally got committed together to honoring God in our relationship and together we began to get focused on living for God.

CN- Thankfully all of my commitment to sports paid off, and I received a full-scholarship to play football at Liberty University after High School. It was the best of all worlds for me; a Christian school where I could play sports and have that be my identity. I figured it would be like 4 years of FCA camp.

And then I realized that my real God was football, and Jesus had just been my good-luck charm to help me play well.

After the Spring Football Game my sophomore year I thought my football dream was over. I'd been competing for the starting quarterback job with another quarterback and I'd thrown 3 interceptions in the game. That night as I laid in bed I had to ask myself for the first time whether or not I'd still follow Jesus with all my heart if it didn't benefit me on the football field.

This was a huge faith moment for me, maybe the first time in my life I considered following Jesus just for Jesus...and the answer was that I would. I committed that night, laying in bed in my dorm room by myself, that I would follow Jesus for Jesus, not just for what Jesus could give me.

Somehow my coaches gave me another chance and I ended up starting for 2 years, but football always came second after that. It was a huge moment in my faith journey.

My Story Journal

Homework: Write out in a paragraph or two your story of how have fully committed/surrendered your life to following Jesus.

Prayer: Father, thank you for helping me grow in my faith and overcome areas that were holding me back. Help me continue to overcome the areas I still struggle with. With renewed vigor I commit all my life to you! Amen

This is my story and how following Jesus made a difference in my life.



Week 6

Theme Night ideas: Burgers and Hot Dog picnic

Icebreaker ideas: What is a bucket list item that you would like to do?

Paul joined the 'mission' of Jesus [Acts 26:19-23] and he spread the message of Jesus [Acts 26:23]

Acts 26:19-23 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. 20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. 21 That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. 22 But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—23 that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

Scriptural Background:

READ Acts 26:19-23 as Paul shares with King Agrippa and Festus in Caesarea. Paul was clearly in the midst of his mission for Jesus...even though it had landed him in prison. He boldly says that he was not disobedient to the vision from heaven he received. Paul's example shows us the boldness and determination we should have in serving Jesus, even though difficulty will come. Our steps of service may begin small and grow as God strengthens us and leads us.

Big Idea: Paul was confident and bold in the mission that Jesus gave to each of us...to spread the message of Jesus to the whole world. He had learned the Scriptures and now understood them clearly since his eyes had been opened by Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He was willing to suffer the risks since he knew that God was helping him accomplish His purpose. He was on mission till the end...till he ultimately gave His life for the cause of Christ.

To develop your Story begin to dialogue about the questions below.



Key Questions to Develop "My Story":

He joined the 'mission' of Jesus:

- When did you get on mission?
- What did it first look like
- How did it feel?
- What did you do?
- Where did you first begin to serve?
- What impact were/are you having?

He spread the message of Jesus:

- Who have you told?
- How have you told?
- Who do you continue to reach out to?
- How can God use your story and you use your story to reach people far from God?

Notes:

Difference Maker Moment: What can we all do if we are unified in our purpose for Jesus?

Galatians 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

My Story Examples:

RH-I had a friend named Kevin that I looked up to at church come up to me, I can still picture where we were and how he worded it "I think you should serve in the youth ministry, I think your story could help some kids". This was the beginning of our lives becoming more like Jesus. With my girlfriend Heather, who was soon to be my fiancé...we began to serve in the youth ministry and go to church every time the doors were open. As we served, God continued to mold our lives. We learned how to study our Bibles and how to pray and God shaped our hearts toward Him and toward each other. We were married in May of 1999 and now have 4 amazing kids of our own.

RH-After years of faithfully serving in the youth group and leading or attending various Bible studies I began to hear the call of God on my life to serve Him in full time ministry. Being a businessman I had just assumed I would strive to be the best Christian

businessman I could be....maybe I didn't think God would want use me after the life that I had lived previously. But I finally responded to the call that he had on my life. I couldn't to put it off any longer.

At a youth camp I was serving at in the summer of 2004 I made the final decision to go into full time ministry. 10 years after that decision I am still serving Him...amazed by His grace toward me.

That's my story, that's how the gospel and following Jesus has changed my life, and I want to the world to know who Jesus is and how he has changed me...

CN- It was less than 6 months after that that I felt that God wanted me to be a pastor and go into ministry. I was sitting in a class at Liberty listening to somebody talk about how he lived every day of his life to impact people for Jesus, and I just felt like God told me that that was what I was supposed to do. I changed my major that day from Education with a History/ Government emphasis, to Religion, with a student ministry emphasis, and the rest really is history for me.

CN- After meeting my wife, Danielle, and getting married, we started in ministry in May 2000. I was a Youth Pastor for 7 years, and saw a youth ministry grow from 45 students to over 600 teens that went to camp with us one year. We had our two kids, Christian and Kasey, so I moved out of day to day ministry w/ teens and began to preach and teach more and work w/ couples closer to our age after 2006. And in 2009, during a trip to South Korea, I really felt that God wanted me to move to a new community and start a church that would reach people who were currently far from God, especially those with kids and grandkids, and really teach them and inspire them to live for Jesus and make an impact for him in the world.

It's been an incredible 3 years living in Lee's Summit and seeing that happen, and I still believe THE BEST IS YET TO COME!

That's my story, that's how following Jesus has made a difference in MY LIFE.

My Story Journal

Homework: Write out in a paragraph or two your story of how you are sharing Jesus with people in your life.



Prayer: Father, thank you for the desire in my heart to serve you and to accomplish great things for you. I pray for those I still need to reach out to. Give me wisdom, strength and the love of Jesus for others to finish the mission you have for me. Amen

This is my story and how following Jesus made a difference in my life.



If you are working through this Story Curriculum and realize that you are unsure of when or if you have ever begun a relationship with Jesus then we want to help you solidify that decision. This is not something to be ashamed of or embarrassed about. Even if you grew up in church all your life it is still possible to now realize that you need to begin a personal relationship with Jesus. With a sincere heart and a heart that realizes you are a sinner in need of a personal savior you can pray this prayer and ask Jesus to forgive you and come into your life.

Prayer to begin a personal relationship with Jesus.

Dear Jesus,

I recognize that I am a sinner and that you died on the cross and rose again in order to pay for the penalty of my sins. Forgive me. Come into my heart. Help me to live my life for you through the power of the Holy Spirit in my life. Thank you for loving me and for saving me.

In Your Precious Name,

Amen

If you just prayed that prayer...you have just written an important portion of your story. Jesus is not done with you. He will continue to write your story and make a difference in your life.

