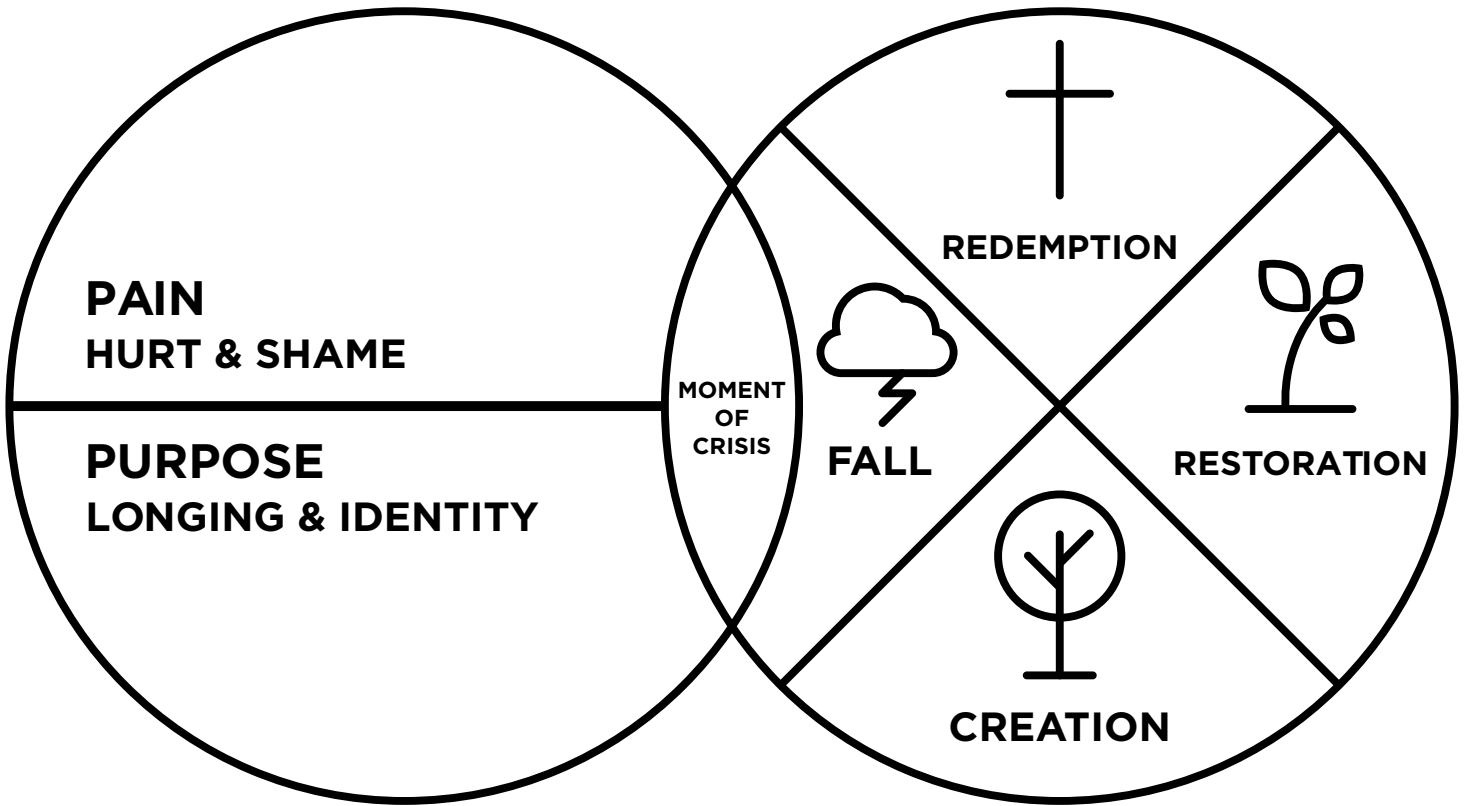


THE GRACE STORY TOOL

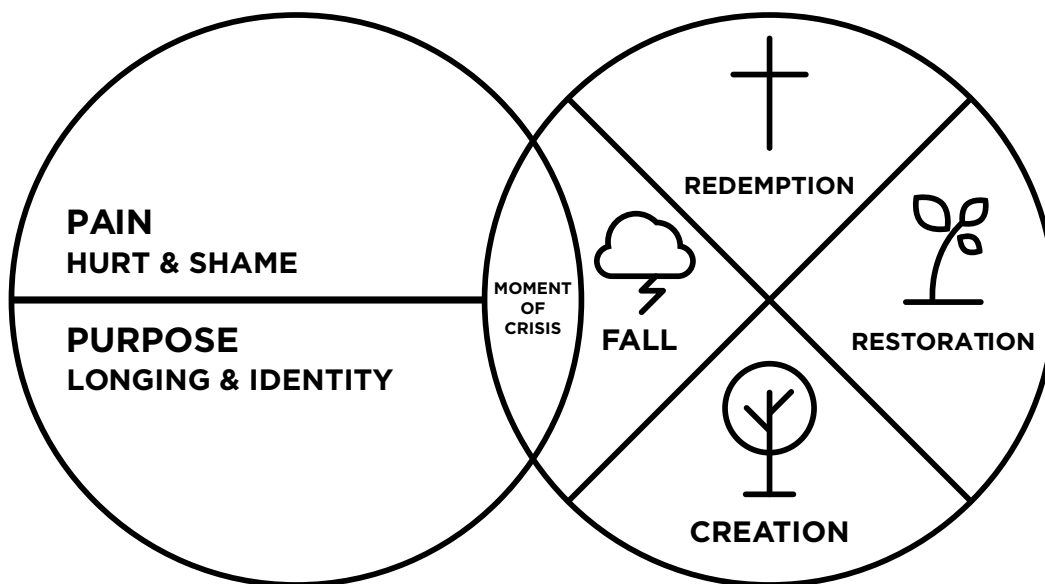


THE GRACE STORY TOOL

HOW DO I SHARE MY GRACE STORY?

*“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”
-Rom. 10:14*

“But in your hearts honor Christ as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” -1 Pet. 3:15



EVANGELISM: A MINDSET, A MESSAGE, AND A METHOD

Depending on how long you've followed Jesus and perhaps your faith background, hearing the terms "Evangelism" or "Witnessing" can bring up a host of emotions or responses. Perhaps this word brings up a memory of a ministry leader inviting you to join them by going door-to-door on a weeknight to share the Jesus with people in the neighborhood, and you remember the tension of wondering what you would say or how you would be received. Or maybe you recall a time in your life where you felt a sincere burden for a friend or a loved one to know the Jesus you know, but you weren't sure how to have the conversation. Or maybe the word evangelism brings up images of a diagram you learned to draw on a napkin to explain salvation, or a series of Bible verses you memorized and quoted in a particular order, or a specifically worded prayer you

were trained to invite someone to repeat after you. All of these experiences fall under the umbrella of evangelism, but how exactly is scripture calling you and I personally to participate? Where do we start?

As disciples of Jesus Christ ourselves, we need to recognize our part in evangelism as three-fold: it's a mindset we take, a message we speak, and a method we use to introduce people to the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ as we go about our God-given mission of making and mobilizing disciples.

EVANGELISM IS A MINDSET - EVERY PERSON HAS A STORY

People love stories. This is why we flock to the movies, binge a good series on Netflix, or read or reread stories like C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* or Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Nothing beats a good story because we can relate to the tragedy or the triumphs of the main characters. As human beings ourselves we can feel the emotions and the tension of a story that hangs in the balance, and we breathe a sigh of relief when the hero wins the day or when the two seemingly hopeless romantics finally figure out that they've fallen in love.

Every people group and every society tells stories, regardless of the medium in which they're shared. It's in our wiring as humans to love a good story. Perhaps this is because as creatures made in the image of God, whether we acknowledge that reality or not, we recognize that there is something intrinsically significant about each person's life; and that we are the protagonists in a story that is still being written while we are alive. Every person's story is filled with chapters of success or hopefulness, but also chapters of failure and brokenness. This is the human condition because of sin. This painful reality leaves a very unsettling feeling in the heart of a person when they begin to realize that their story may not have that "happily ever after ending" they always hoped it would have.

As Christians, the gospel message became an incredibly personal part of our story when we first heard it, believed it, and confessed it; whether that happened all at once or over a period of time. Romans 10:9-10 tells us if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that Jesus died in our place for sin and then was raised to life, then we are saved from the penalty of sin.

The process upon my belief whereby God transfers my debt onto Christ, accepting the payment of His life in my place, and then clothes me in Christ's righteousness is known in theological terms as Justification.

Justification is a legal term which states a guilty party has been "made just." Another way of saying this is that all outstanding debts are settled. This is a one time for all binding agreement paid with the blood of Christ for me. This is incredibly good news! I am no longer condemned by my sin.

But this good news continues to be personal to us each and every day that we live lives of worship in light of God's love and forgiveness. God's commitment to me doesn't stop at Justification.

Through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, God commits to transform me into a new creation with Jesus as the standard (Rom. 8:29-30). This process is known as Sanctification, literally meaning to ‘make holy’.

God does this through the transforming of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2) to bring the legal statement of ‘Justified’ and righteous because of Christ in parallel with the day-to-day ways He is changing me to be righteous in my nature. This work is ongoing as I apply the truth of God’s Word and the gospel message in every area of my life. As I am obedient to the work of the Spirit in me it has the profound effect of changing my desires into godly desires and my actions into God-honoring actions.

One day when the work of sanctification is complete and Jesus’ promise of making all things new (Rev. 21) has resulted in a completely new me, I will stand before Him as the finished product. This final step in the gospel story is my Glorification.

I know there is a day coming when I will stand before my savior not in shame but in victory. I will continue with Him eternally in this glorified state in Heaven, the place He has prepared for me, where there is no sin nor effect of sin at work anymore.

So, in summary, when I accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, I am recognizing and believing that my story is really part of a greater story that God has been writing since the beginning of the world. I am confident in the ending of the story because I know what God has done to guarantee the outcome. This means the pressure is not on me to write my own ending and what an amazing peace and mindset this is to live in.

Because I understand this personally in my story, I also know that every person has a story with similar themes of brokenness like what I have experienced. So, I am always looking and listening to others for ways to build bridges of conversation through the common story arc of the shared human experience with sin. So, when we speak of evangelism as a mindset, it’s really this:

As I am personally living live my life with Jesus as the hero of my story, I choose to invest myself intentionally into relationships with others and look for ways to help them connect their stories to His. I do this best by sharing how His story intersected my own. This is my Grace Story.

EVANGELISM IS A MESSAGE – CONNECTING MY STORY TO YOUR STORY

The literal word “evangelism” comes from the Greek word “evangelion” which simply means “telling good news”. It’s like the new dad that calls up his parents after his little daughter has been born to share all the details of the length, weight, time of birth, and the status of baby and mom. It’s like the newly engaged couple posting that video of the proposal and all the steps he took to plan the perfect day. It’s like a voice coming over the intercom at the department store alerting a worried parent that their lost child has been located and can be found at the customer service desk. It’s good news. And when we speak of evangelism in scripture, we’re talking about telling the best news of

all time: that people (like me and like you) who were far from God because of our sin can be brought close through the obedience and the blood of Jesus Christ.

This means doing the work of listening and learning how to recognize how the Gospel speaks to the chapters of brokenness in every person's story. I take on this mindset first as I apply the Gospel each and every day to my own story, telling and retelling myself the truth of what Christ has done to change the trajectory of my life. Then through relationship with people I take on that mindset by being a good listener, hearing the chapters of brokenness in their story, and looking for bridges through this shared human experience to share how I realized my story connected to God's.

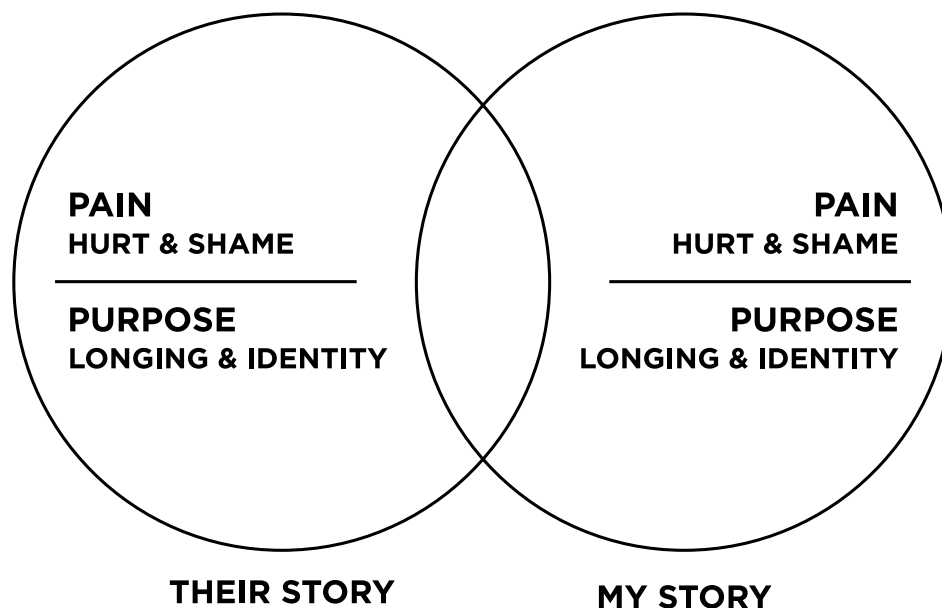
There are two main areas of brokenness that find their way into the chapters of brokenness in every human's story: **PAIN & PURPOSE**. Here's a breakdown of what these chapters look like:

PAIN CHAPTERS - Hurt & Shame

These are chapters of brokenness where a person has been hurt by others, has felt shame from how they have hurt others, or has experienced pain due to the consequences of a broken world. Though the weight and the scope of pain may be different for each person, (and that is important to be sensitive to that when sharing my story with someone else,) at its' core pain is pain. We can relate to that reality on a personal level even if we haven't experienced the same specific pain as someone else.

PURPOSE CHAPTERS - Longing & Identity

These are chapters where a person has experienced the longing for a better life, longing for forgiveness or restored relationship, longing for personal justice or for the world to be made right. These may also chapters of sharing markers upon which a person's identity is resting like personal ambition, relationships, performance, sexuality, etc. Within these chapters we see personalized attempts to answer basic questions of humanity like "Who am I?" or "What am I here to do?" or "What will happen to me?"



Building a Bridge

When I have identified the chapters of brokenness in the person I am desiring to share my grace story with, I should then consider how best to share my own experience that left me feeling broken. This is your life without the hope of Christ. For those who came to faith at a younger age, you may not have a lengthy timeframe before you accepted Christ. This is not a problem because each of us can easily share personal examples even since coming to faith where sin has played a part in creating pain or in the temptation to find purpose in something that did not satisfy. What is the brokenness chapter in your story that relates the best to the experience in this person's story? When I share my story through the shared human experience of brokenness, I can build a bridge linking my pain and purpose chapters to yours. These chapters are specific to my story, so I must listen well to find the common thread of human brokenness in both our stories. This process isn't supposed to be a script I read, but a conversation I share. There may be some back in forth dialogue as I share and give clarity to my story and listen to theirs.

Moment of Crisis

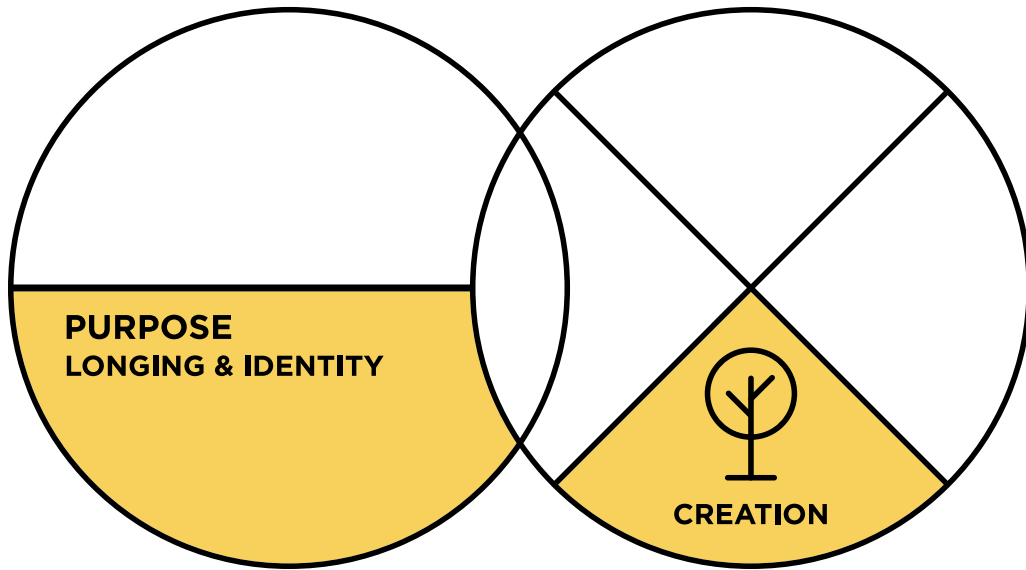
Once I am able to identify the bridge of brokenness and share this with my friend, I need to then share with them my "Moment of Crisis". This is the particular moment or perhaps season when I began to realize that something had to change, there had to be something more to life than what I was experiencing, that sin, even if you didn't know that term at the time, was wrecking your life. This moment could have been under the teaching of a pastor or kids class teacher, or a caring friend who shared with you God's Story. Or perhaps you picked up a Bible on your own and began reading. What was that first moment or season in your life where you were introduced to God's story?

TELLING GOD'S STORY

When you arrive at your moment of crisis as you share your story, you can now begin to build a bridge to God's Story. You might transition to God's Story with a statement like this: "I found my story was part of a bigger story, and there was an explanation for the pain I was experiencing or the identify I felt I was losing. Can I share this with you?"

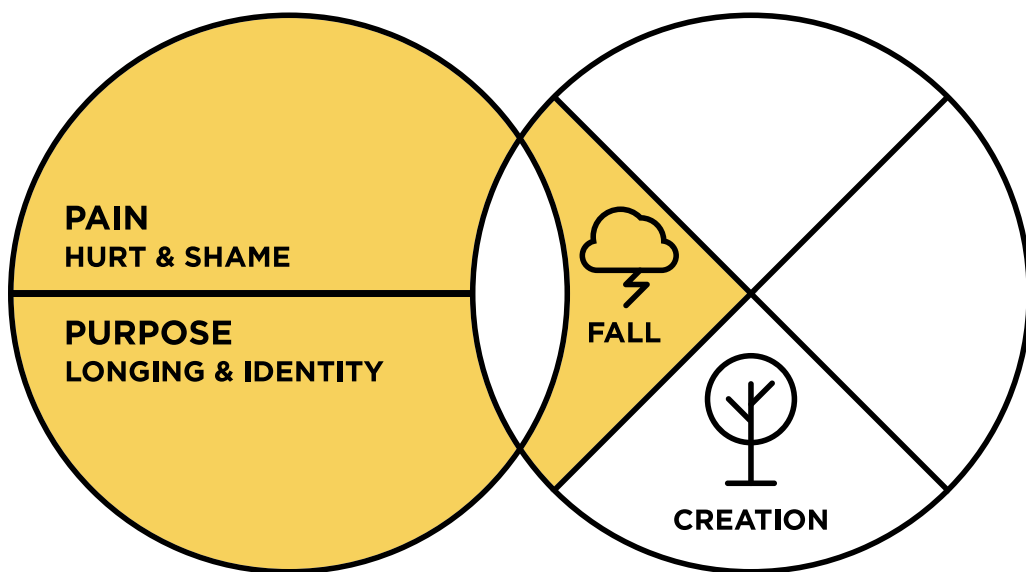
There are four critical elements that I need to share when I am connecting my story to God's: **Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration**. Here's a breakdown of what each represents:

CREATION - "GOD CREATED EVERYTHING"



- ▶ God made everything: light, stars, oceans, plants, animals, people...and it was GOOD. (Gen. 1)
- ▶ God made people unique in all of creation by making them in His IMAGE (Gen. 1:26-27) - carrying attributes like His own for relating to Him and one another like love, justice, creativity, a sense of wonder, the experience of Joy and so on.
- ▶ In short, God made people to know Him and experience His love. Each one created for purpose and belonging.

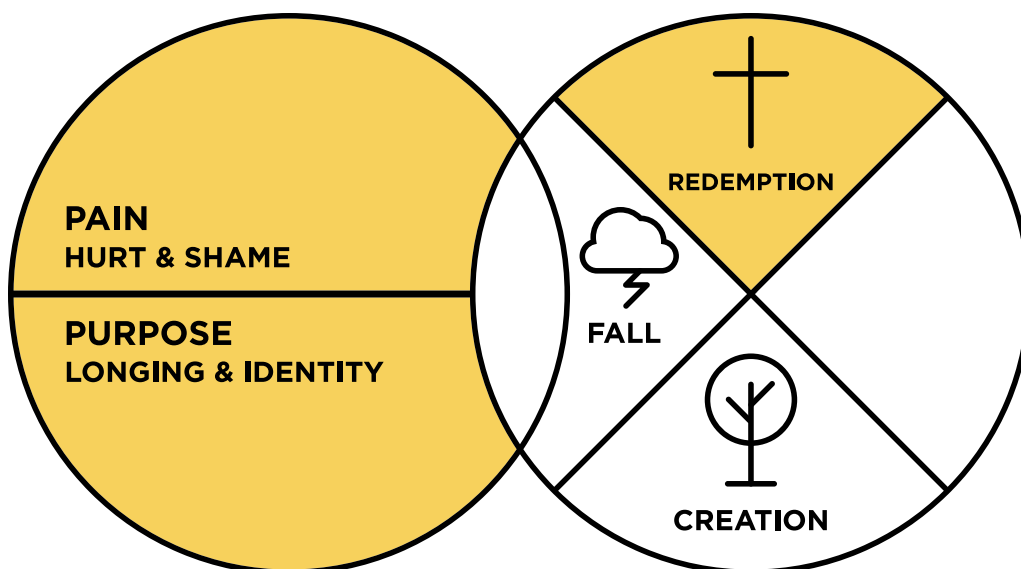
FALL - "SIN BROKE EVERYTHING"



- ▶ This is where we come to realize our story intersects with God's - Sin entered the world and damaged what God made good.
- ▶ PAIN was introduced and PURPOSE was lost when SIN entered the world through the Fall. (Rom. 3:23)

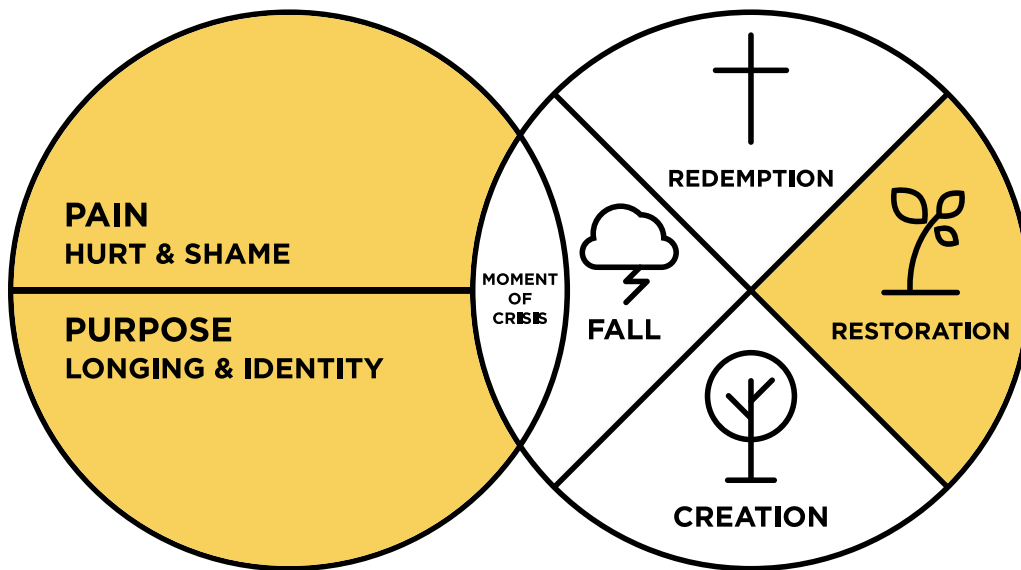
- ▶ God made man with the ability to CHOOSE to love Him in return.
- ▶ The first people, and every person since, CHOSE to REJECT God.
- ▶ God calls this rejection SIN. This is the explanation for the PAIN we have gained and the loss of PURPOSE every person is searching for.
- ▶ Sin comes at the cost of relationship with God, but it also forfeits what God gave to me as CREATOR: MY LIFE.
- ▶ Because we choose SIN, we choose to experience the pain that comes along with it, including the physical and spiritual death apart from God forever.
- ▶ SIN continues to create PAIN in our lives individually and in our world as all the rest of creation was affected negatively by the sin of people.

REDEMPTION - "JESUS GAVE EVERYTHING"



- ▶ God in His love was not content to leave us in a state where we were constantly LONGING for the PURPOSE we were created for and yet be unable to attain it.
- ▶ To satisfy the offense of rejecting God, a LIFE is required. (Rom. 6:23)
- ▶ To save my LIFE it would require another LIFE in exchange, but this LIFE must not be guilty of the same rejection mine was.
- ▶ God sent His son JESUS to redeem us. Jesus lived a perfect life without sin, then willingly gave up His life on a cross as a substitute to redeem my life from sin, and then rose again after 3 days to show the exchange was accepted by God.
- ▶ His resurrection demonstrated that He had the power to restore His life from death, and thereby He could and would do the same for those who would believe and accept His gift. This resurrection reality gives me the confidence that the brokenness I experience in this life is a temporary reality.
- ▶ God said that anyone who believes that Jesus died in their place will be saved from sin, be forgiven, be restored to a relationship with Him. (Rom. 10:9-10)

RESTORATION - "JESUS FIXES EVERYTHING"



- ▶ When I accept Jesus' life in my place, I am restored to God and being restored by Him.
- ▶ God calls me not only a friend, but He adopts me as a child into His family. (Eph. 1:3-10)
- ▶ Jesus' restoration is twofold: He promises His presence and love now, and promises that all things will be made new for eternity — including me.
- ▶ As Jesus restores me, I can experience healing from the chapters of PAIN I've experienced and because I am a NEW CREATION I can begin to see and enjoy my original PURPOSE which is to KNOW GOD and experience His love.
- ▶ I can also know and understand LIFE as it was meant to be as I live under His GOOD plan for my life.
- ▶ And further, I have the promise of being with God for eternity in Heaven when I die.

EVANGELISM IS A METHOD: USING THE GRACE STORY TOOL

When we understand the mindset and the message of Evangelism, we need to consider the method in which we share our Grace Story. A method is simply a tool. The strength and power of your personal Grace Story is more powerful than a diagram to communicate the hope of the Gospel, but often a diagram is helpful for me to understand how to go about this task.

The Grace Story tool is something you can use to train yourself to connect your story to God's when sharing it with a friend. You may choose in your conversations to actually write out this diagram as a visual means of telling God's story if the person is a visual learner. But most importantly you can use this tool personally to help you frame your story.

This tool is simply two circles representing the convergence of two stories: yours and God's. Starting on the left, this circle represents your story with all its chapters of brokenness. These are both the chapters of pain where you experienced hurt and the shame of sin, but also chapters of purpose and the longing for significance or identity.

Put It into Practice

Exercise #1 - IDENTIFYING MY CHAPTERS OF BROKENNESS

Take some time to write out how you have personally experienced the pain of sin or the loss of a sense of purpose in the brokenness it brings. Write it out in paragraph form as if you are telling a story about your life. Here are some statements that may help you get started:

- ▶ Pain - "I could not understand why THIS had to happen to ME."
- ▶ Pain - "I was so ashamed of what I'd done, I didn't see how anyone could love me."
- ▶ Pain - "I tried to ease my pain by...only to find myself more broken."
- ▶ Pain - "I really struggled with events happening in our world. No matter what we do as a culture it seemed things only got worse."
- ▶ Purpose - "I thought when I found my identity in...I would finally feel complete, but I was wrong."
- ▶ Purpose - "I had everything I wanted, but I was still unhappy."

As you continue to the right in the Grace Story tool you see where your story connects with God's, at the **Moment of Crisis**, that critical moment or season when either someone shared with you or you learned that God's Story gave an explanation for the things you were experiencing.

Exercise #2 - WHEN WAS MY MOMENT OF CRISIS?

The Moment of Crisis is that time or season in your life when you were at your breaking point, or when you first heard God's story for the first time and you were suddenly aware of the power of sin in your life. This was the game-changer for you that opened your ears to listen to God's Story. Take some time to think through and write out your Moment of Crisis. Again, write it in paragraph form like you are telling a story.

The Moment of Crisis is the critical time when I saw that my story connected to God's. As you follow the diagram to the circle on the right we see this intersection takes place at the FALL. When using this tool to share God's Story you'll want to back up a step and tell the CREATION part first to give understanding to why the FALL was not the way God set things into motion. Then follow the movement of the circle clockwise to tell the remaining elements: FALL, REDEMPTION, and then finally RESTORATION.

Exercise #3 - CAN I TELL GOD'S STORY?

Using the tool, start with CREATION and write out how you would explain God's Story in your own words following the circle around clockwise until you reach RESTORATION. If you need help, reference the write up of God's Story in the previous section.

CALLING FOR A RESPONSE

The Gospel is not simply information to download, but a story that requires a response. 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to always be ready to make a defense for the reason of hope within us, but to do it with gentleness and respect. We should always be gentle when approaching asking someone to respond because we want this to be something they truly want to be true for themselves. However, we should not shy away from asking them how this is hitting them.

After I have shared my story and God's story, I should give my friend an opportunity to respond. I might follow this up with a question like this:

"I have come to experience this story personally and have trusted Jesus as my savior, He is rewriting my story...is this something you would like to do?"

IF THEY SAY "YES"

God's Word tells us that accepting Christ as savior is two-fold: believing and confessing. If they believe it is true, encourage them that they can say so by talking to God about

it in prayer. It is likely they have never prayed before or have a concept of what that is. They may be hesitant or afraid of saying the wrong words or protocol. Encourage them that God is listening and understands what is in their heart, explain that prayer is a conversation with God and give them a general idea of how to proceed. You may choose as to model an example like this:

“Dear God, I realize that the things I have experienced in my life are a result of my own sin and that I deserve separation from you. Please forgive me. I accept that Jesus died on the cross and was brought back to life to save me from my sin. Today I accept Him as my Lord and Savior and want you to make me into the new creation you want me to be. Amen.”

This is only an example of a prayer you may share, though it is often great to just simply encourage them talk to God in their own words. After this prayer encourage them with the truth that God’s Word says that if they believe in their heart and have confessed with their mouth that they are in fact saved from this moment on, this cannot be taken away from them (John 10:28-29). Rejoice with them and make a plan to begin introducing them to how they begin this journey as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

IF THEY SAY “NO” OR “I’M NOT READY”

In Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8 Jesus told a parable about a sower who went out to plant seed. Some of that seed fell on the path, some in the rocky soil, some among the thorns, and some in good soil. Each of these four soils represents the heart of a person in response to the Gospel message. My responsibility as an evangelist is not the condition of a person’s heart...only the Holy Spirit can make them ready to receive the word. My responsibility is simply to sow seeds. Often a person has to come face to face with the gospel message multiple times before believing. Your first time sharing your grace story with your friend will likely not be your only time.

If you receive a “no” or a “I’m not ready for that” commit to pray that the Holy Spirit will plant that seed you sowed deep within their heart. He can cause it to take root at any time, so be faithful to wait to see Him work and be ready to have further conversation.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

“Evangelism as Exiles” - Elliot Clark

“Gospel Fluency” - Jeff Vanderstelt

“Sharing Jesus Without Freaking Out” - D. Scott Hildreth, Steven A McKinion

“The Master Plan of Evangelism” - Dr. Robert E. Coleman

