

Week one – life stories

# You Are Here

*You Are Here* tells the story of the Bible in its own words. It comes in eight parts, and is meant to be read aloud and shared with friends.

## Week one - life stories



### Introduction

Over the next eight weeks, your community will be exploring the most important story ever told – the Story of God, his planet, and his people. It's a story that tells us who we are, where we fit in the history of everything. You will be reading it together, starting next week. This week clears the ground and lays the foundations, and will help you to get the best out of your time together.

This session aims to do two things:

- 1 Explore your community's understanding of the Bible, through the 12 Words challenge – can you tell the Bible's story in just 12 words?
- 2 Show why stories matter, how they shape and define who we are, by investigating the stories that are all around us.

## Part one – 12 words



This first part of the session is all about the Bible, how your community perceives it, and what you think it is about. To open up the conversation, try the 12 Words challenge together. Can you summarise the story of the whole Bible in just twelve words?

### Activity 1: 12 Words

- 1 On your own or in groups of three or four, choose twelve words that you think sum up the story that the Bible tells. Allow twenty minutes or so to reflect and decide together.
- 2 Feed back to the wider group, sharing your twelve words and talking about your choices. What kinds of words have people chosen? Theological terms? Story words? Characters and places? The responses will tell you a lot about how people understand the Bible.
- 3 Discuss together how you see the Bible. Is it a set of truths to be understood? A guidebook for living? Or is it a story that we are invited to participate in?



Now look at the twelve words printed on the pull-out of the *You Are Here* workbook, or in the box on the right. What do you make of these words?

Ours are story words, imaginative words. They can be in sequence, but they are also themes, a bit like recurring harmonies.

*Explain: Let's be honest – no twelve words are ever going to sum up the whole story of the Bible. The reason for trying it is that it makes us take a step back from our usual Bible readings, and consider the story as a whole.*

Keep your lists of words, and you can use them for a concluding session to see if your view of the Bible has changed at all.

Light  
Trees  
Nomad  
Tribes  
Scatterlings  
Promises  
Earthed  
Sacrifice  
Unbreak-  
able  
Wildfire  
Salt

## Part two – defining stories



The Bible is a story. To understand why that matters, we need to investigate stories themselves – what they are and how they work. This section opens up the world of stories and gets us thinking about the stories that fill our lives, through a series of short activities.

### Activity 1: The stories we tell

This exercise requires a little forward planning from a facilitator. As people arrive, they will inevitably chat before the session gets underway – and that means they will tell stories. Without telling anyone what you're doing, make a note of any stories that crop up.

You'll hear people talking about their day or week; maybe a journey they made, something their child got up to, little snippets of experiences. Others might be back from holiday or recently had a job interview. Once you start listening for them, you'll see just how many stories we tell each other.

*Explain: We are surrounded by stories. Sharing them with each other is a natural human interaction. Our lives are full of stories, made up of stories, and the more we look the more we'll see.*

Now tell the rest of the group some of the stories they have told each other on the way in.

Stories are all around us. We each have a life story – they story of how we got here. Within it will be family stories, places we lived, special relationships, jobs that we did, life-changing events, both good and bad. Each day we add new elements to our life story. We live our lives one moment at a time, but we turn our experiences into narratives as we remember them. It's how we make sense of ourselves.



### Activity 2: Defining stories

Does anyone has a story about anything that they are wearing today, or an item they have with them? It could be an item of clothing, a keyring, or a piece of jewellery. Invite one or two people to share them briefly.

*Explain: This shows how stories form and attach themselves to things. Stories make connections between visible things like the objects just shared, and invisible things, like emotion, memories, or hopes for the future. Stories create meaning – it is the stories behind these objects that makes them special.*



Now choose someone in the room or ask for a volunteer. Ask them to tell the group their full name. Why are they called that?

(The answer you get will almost certainly be a story – most likely of a person who was significant to their parents, a hope their parents had for them, or a family tradition.)

*Stories don't just order the things around us – they define us too. Stories make us who we are.*

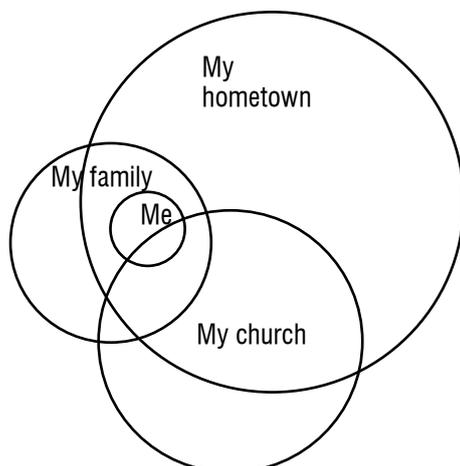
*By looking at surnames and middle names we uncover some of the family stories that make us who we are. They are our identity. But family is just one of dozens of stories that impact us, and that we impact in turn.*

### Activity 3: Stories within stories

This example demonstrates how we live out the stories around us. You can either do this with your own life, or with one of the people who just shared the story behind their name.

Take a large piece of paper, and draw a small circle in the middle. This is your life story. Now draw another circle that overlaps it – the story of your family. Add another circle for the story of the town you grew up in, and then the story of the school you went to, your workplace. Keep on adding circles as you think of more stories. Some of them will be small and personal to you. Others may involve hundreds of others and span across decades – the story of your country, your church, a political party or a movement that you are part of.

*Explain: These are the stories we find ourselves in – dozens of stories that make sense of who we are and what our life is all about. Some of them are all about us, and others are much bigger than we are and we play just a small part.*



Even though we might never have thought about it, we know our place in each one of these stories instinctively. We understand how they all fit together and interact with each other.



Over all of our stories are the much bigger ones – the story of the human race, of planet earth, of the solar system.

And over and above all of these is the Story of God – the story that the Bible tells.

## Conclusion

Stories matter. They have a unique capacity to reach our emotions and capture our imaginations, to define us and shape our identity. The stories of our own lives, our family histories, right through to the great ongoing stories of our time, securing peace or ending poverty – these stories tell us who we are and where we stand.

We stand inside the Bible's story in the same way that we inhabit all these other personal and cultural stories. It defines us and the world around us. Over the next few weeks your group will be exploring the Bible as a story, as our Story.

