



## The Practice of Story

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Based on material from *Soul Matters-Small Group: The Practice of Story*

Compiled & adapted by Marie McIntyre, December 2024

### Optional Spiritual Practice: Creating Your “Reverse Bucket List”

This month’s spiritual practice can be found on the last page of the handout. If you choose to complete this activity, please feel free to share your experience during our discussion of “Story”.

#### Welcome & Chalice Lighting

Out of darkness, light.

Out of light, warmth.

Out of warmth, togetherness.

Out of togetherness, joy.

May this flame hold us together for the time that we are here. *-Ben Soule*

#### Personal Check In

Briefly share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

#### Opening Words

October in London was cold, gray, and rainy—the kind of weather that makes many people want to stay curled up under a blanket. Yet no one in London seemed to care, which made me think about the stories we tell ourselves and how powerful they are.

People are not born hating rain. To kids, rain can seem like a fun opportunity to splash in puddles and smear mud on their hands. But if they keep hearing adults say “*You can’t go out, it’s raining!*”, they begin to think rain is bad. So what happens if we rewrite that story? Instead of saying, “*It’s raining, you have to stay in,*” we might say, “*What a beautiful rainy day—let’s go outside and have fun!*”.

We all have our own stories – that is, old scripts which we follow blindly without even realizing it. If you keep telling yourself that travel is exhausting, you will only notice the hassles. If you keep telling yourself that you’re awkward in social settings, you may tense up before a conversation even begins. But if you begin to play with your beliefs, you might discover that some really are just stories. And if you don’t like the story, you can change the story.

*Adapted from “How Invisible Stories Hold You Back” by Ozan Varol*

#### Questions for reflection and discussion

1. How have you been affected by family stories or legends which you heard from parents or elders? Was the effect positive or negative?
2. Growing up, did you have an assigned “story” (or role) in your family? Were you the funny one, the talented one, the troublemaker, the quiet one, the clumsy one, the rebel, the leader, the smart one, the difficult one, the well-behaved one, or something else? Has that story lived on in your family? How might it have affected your life?
3. Authors often talk about trying to write “in their own voice.” At this point, how has your life story has been written in your own voice?
4. When you talk about your life, is there a part of the story which you usually leave out? What might happen if you let it back in?
5. Some stories can be reflected physically. When you look at your body, what aspects of your life are reflected? How do you feel about that?
6. What story from your life would you like to have someone tell at your funeral?

## Readings

When we deny our stories and disengage from tough emotions, they don't go away; instead, they own us, they define us. Our job is not to deny the story, but to defy the ending. *-Brené Brown*

How long will you keep holding on to the story you don't want to keep reliving? *-Joseph Nguyen*

At some point we have to understand that we do not need to carry a story that is unbearable. We can observe the story, which is mental; feel the story, which is physical; let the story go, which is emotional; then forgive the story, which is spiritual. *-Joy Harjo*

The question is not so much 'What do I learn from stories?' as 'What stories do I want to live?' *-David Loy*

You are the main character in the story of your life, but other people are the main characters of their own lives. Sometimes you can find healing just by playing a supporting role in someone else's experience. *-Timothy Kurek*

Listening to both sides of a story will convince you that there is more to a story than both sides. *-Frank Tyger*

Those who tell the stories rule the world. *-Proverb, source unknown*

Humans don't fight over territory and food. They fight over imaginary stories in their minds. *-Yuval Noah Harari*

I see my dad through my own filter and then present it to the world as whole, when really it is inherently inadequate—full of the holes of my own limitations. My story of my dad is my story of my dad and me. Always. *-Courtney Martin*

Don't believe everything you think. *-Thubten Chodron*

**Sitting in Silence** - Time to reflect on questions and readings before sharing begins.

**Sharing** - Time for speaking without interruption and deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share responses to one or more of the session questions or the readings.

(This is usually a good time to take a brief break)

### **Response – Hold Up and Hold Out**

Hold up with gratitude one thing that you heard in the sharing that especially struck you as you listened. Hold out how that connects to your life or clarified something about your own situation. Continue to practice deep listening

### **Closing reading**

The power of stories can also be witnessed on a cultural level – for example, consider our national struggle with economic disparities or racial injustice. An unconscionable income gap may be described as “natural” or “the result of complex global dynamics”. The history of race in our country may be minimized with a story about “how far we have come.” The unfortunate effect of these narratives is to discourage action and undermine our belief that things can change. In our own faith, telling a new story has been central from the beginning. As Unitarian-Universalists, we do not look to an all-powerful God to write the world's story, but believe we have the power to effect change by creating narratives of our own. *-Adapted from Soul Matters, The Practice of Story*

## **Announcements/Plans**

### **Check out**

As we close today, how are you feeling now?

### **Extinguish the Chalice**

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

## **Optional Spiritual Practice**

### **Creating a “Reverse Bucket List”**

People often talk about making a “bucket list” of all the amazing things they want to do before they die. But in addition to focusing on how we hope to make our story amazing in the future, we may also want to reflect on how our life has already been remarkable.

To practice this, consider making a “reverse bucket list” – that is, one which looks back instead of forward and helps you appreciate the story of your life so far. Here’s one example: [How the Reverse Bucket List Promotes Confidence, Motivation, & Gratitude.](#)

To start making your list, you might consider these five questions:

1. What are you pleased about with the relationships in your life?
2. What actions or accomplishments do you feel especially proud of?
3. When have you been there to support or help someone you care for?
4. What difficulties have you managed to get through and overcome?
5. What things have you done that are interesting or unusual?

If you choose to complete this activity before our session, please feel free to share your experience during the discussion of “Story”.