

# My Story

## Nextlevel Covenant Group Retreat

The purpose of this mini-retreat is to deepen the relationships within this group. We will accomplish this by gaining a better understanding of the lives of each woman, as each woman tells her life story. It is rare that we are afforded the opportunity to have someone *really listen* to us tell our story. We are a sum of all the parts of our history and experiences and influences, and of course, the mysterious providential working of God in our lives.

This is your chance to disclose some of your life narrative with other women of faith who are keenly interested in you and genuinely concerned about you. This is not a counselling session; we are not here to fix each other (though there is almost always a surprising catharsis in being heard and understood). This is an exercise in self-disclosure. The greater the transparency and vulnerability, the greater the value for all. Take some new risks. Trust in the covenantal confidentiality and love of your spiritual friends. Trust the Holy Spirit to help you tell your story and to use your story to help others in ways you could not know or measure.

### PREPARATION

Steps One to Three may be done at the beginning of your retreat, but are better done prior to the retreat in order to maximize the sharing time together.

#### Step One: Life-Altering Experiences (10-15 minutes)

On the exercise sheet with four squares, draw a simple picture in each box that conveys the four most life-altering experiences you have had. The experience might be an actual event that had a profound emotional or relational or spiritual impact on you causing you to think or feel or behave differently thereafter about self or life or people or God (e.g., salvation experience, death of a loved one, winning a championship, divorce of parents, etc). Or it may be a period of time (e.g., first year of High School; a lengthy illness, a season of backsliding, a happy early childhood, etc). Include in your drawing some indicators of how you felt at the time (e.g., an angry face; a broken heart, etc). Be creative but keep it simple.

#### Step Two: Life Timeline (15- 20 minutes)

On the exercise sheet with several horizontal lines (landscape orientation), insert the key dates, experiences, seasons, and people (etc) throughout your lifetime. Use symbols, numbers, names, dates, etc, to convey the primary experiences and movements of your life. Be sure to insert the four life-altering events from Step One. You also might want to divide your life into time periods, e.g., early childhood, teens, 20's, 30 to the present, or whatever works best for you. Don't pack too much in to these periods, just the most significant parts of your life story.

#### Step Three: Rehearse the Telling of Your Story

With your timeline in hand, tell yourself your story. The goal is to distill the telling of your story to 30-45 minutes. Focus on that which will help others understand what you have experienced and why/how it has shaped who you are today. Avoid giving details that are extraneous to your story.

### SHARING YOUR LIFE STORY

Each woman will share her life story as her name is pulled from a hat (as the Spirit determines). Have another woman begin each session by praying for the one who is about to tell her story. This exercise can be more difficult for some than for others, but everyone will be encouraged by the attentiveness demonstrated by body language and eye contact. Clarifying questions and appeals for greater detail are welcome as long as they don't disrupt the flow or take too much time. Leave most questions to the end. If possible, a flip chart will be made available to the speaker so she can communicate a simpler version of her timeline for all to see. Each sharing time should be 45-90 minutes.

Be prepared to experience and respond to some emotional surprises (Romans 12:15). Upon completion of her story, speak words of encouragement, and minister to your sister in prayer, giving thanks to God for her uniqueness and value, and for the loving, saving, guiding hand of God in her life. Take short breaks (for snacks, meals, activities) between each woman who shares. Upon completion, celebrate your oneness in Christ with a simple Communion.