

# SHARING OUR STORIES

Core Practice: "Soul Sharing"

## WHAT TO EXPECT

*The practice of "soul sharing" in a Table Community follows the basic pattern:*

[1] **Sharing.** Each person in the group will answer the question: "How is it with your soul?" The TC facilitator, or another member, starts by answering this question.

[2] **Responding.** As someone shares, we encourage everyone else in the group to both listen attentively to what is being shared as well as listening to the Spirit for the person sharing.

[3] **Praying.** After the person shares and the group has responded, someone will pray for the person who has shared. Then the person who has prayed will share and the process repeats.

## SOUL SHARING

*Come and hear, all you who fear God;  
let me tell you what he has done for me.*

Psalm 66:16

Soul sharing is a time of conversation based on a simple question: How is your soul? This is old language, which may sound weird to us, but in essence the question gets at how things are *really* doing with us beneath the surface. Phil Meadows says, "The word "soul" is a way of speaking about the inner life of discipleship, which encompasses our heart and mind, the center of our relationship with God." Our soul is often shaped and formed by our daily circumstances. The question is intended to help us reflect on our experience of following Jesus, through the power of the Spirit, as whole-life disciples and everyday missionaries.

Engaging in the practice of soul sharing helps us walk in the light (1 Jn. 1:5-9) and opens the door for deeper healing as we share our lives with others (Jm. 5:16). We have come to believe that we can only be loved to the degree that we are known.

God can't transform the person we're pretending to be. Real change happens when we bring our true self before God and others.

So much more could be said about this practice, but for now I want to simply encourage you to jump in. We recognize that trust and vulnerability is something earned over time. However, we also know that we have to start somewhere! Why not now?

## SHARING OUR STORIES

*23 Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
24 See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.  
Psalm 139*

Responding to the question, "How is your soul?", may be intimidating to you or even difficult to know exactly what to share. We have found it helpful to reflect on the following four postures of the soul to help prepare for soul sharing:

- **Thanksgiving.** For what can I give thanks to God? This could be where you have felt the presence of Jesus in the midst of your circumstances or sensed the leading of his Spirit to say or do something.
- **Celebration.** What are the points of growth in my life for which I can praise God? These could be answers to prayer, breakthroughs in your journey of discipleship, or particular blessings you have received.
- **Lament.** What has pulled me away from God? A sense of distance can come through experiences of suffering, disappointment, fear, anxiety, or hopelessness, for example.
- **Confession.** What are the areas of weakness or failure in my walk with Jesus? We might be feeling convicted, or even guilty, about things we have said or done, or failed to say and do.

Coming ready to share is important because it allows us to present to others as they share their stories. Giving others our full attention is one of the greatest gifts we can offer each other.

Ask the Spirit to "search you" (Ps 139), ahead of time, and reveal what you need to share with your community, but hold this loosely. It's okay if you end up sharing something different than you prepared. You don't have to answer every question! We have limited time during a Table Community, so share **one thing** you feel led to share with the community.

There are many ways to reflect on our soul (like our vision of discipleship), however, we have found it helpful to start with this simple tool. Don't worry or get frustrated if reflecting on your

life is hard! Most of us live largely unreflective lives, so this practice can be quite jarring at first. Self-reflection, or self-examination, is a lost art and will take time to develop the skill. But as we grow in this practice, I believe we will experience God's love in more profound ways, because we are becoming more known by others.

## **POINTING OTHERS TO JESUS**

*let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds*  
Hebrews 10:24

After someone shares, the community will spend time pointing each other to Jesus by building up (1 Thess. 5:11) and encouraging (Hb. 10:24) the person who shared. We do this by practicing "double-listening" as a community, which means listening intently to the person sharing, at the same time, what the Spirit may be saying for that person.

Practically, this could look like...

- Asking good follow up questions
- Speaking words of encouragement, hope, or even forgiveness
- Bearing one another's burdens by helping walk each other through grief, anxiety, depression, disappointments, etc.
- Sharing a Scripture passage
- Helping one another discern the Spirit's presence more fully
- Offering a picture or word from the Spirit
- Sharing words of wisdom

This is not an exhaustive list. We want to be like the friends who lowered the paralyzed man through the roof in order to get him in front of Jesus (Lk. 5; Mk. 2). Our goal is to boldly and humbly point others to Jesus. Ultimately, anything we share with others should be motivated by love, which is the root of all spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:1).

## **MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY**

What is shared during a Table Community needs to be kept confidential. The core practice of soul sharing is no different. It can be very intimidating to share openly and honestly with others. Nothing is more damaging, as the community seeks to grow in love for one another, than breaking confidences within the group. For this reason, it's extremely important to keep what is said during group in the group.