

STORYTellers

A Prayer Bench Small Group Study

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STORYTellers

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Please note: There is a Spiritual Memoir **Worship Series** to accompany this Study. The series explores spiritual memoir stories in the Bible and invites us to listen to our lives and reflect on the meaning of our ordinary stories, discovering the Holy in our lives. The first service is free. You will find more information in the Prayer Bench Shop.

Preparation for Session 1

Spiritual Memoir: Honouring the Sacred in Our Lives

Leader Notes & Preparation for Session 1

HERE IS THE WEBLINK & PASSWORD TO THE STUDY RESOURCES

WEBLINK: <https://prayerbench.ca/storytellers-small-group-study/>

PASSWORD: Memoir#1

You will need:

- a blessing wall or blessing net used in each of the closing spiritual practices. Please see the Study webpage for suggestions on creating a simple blessing wall/loom or blessing net
- to print and cut the scripture blessings on small pieces of coloured paper. Please see the study webpage for a sheet of scriptural blessings. Read the directions for the closing spiritual practice and prepare before the session begins.
- a circle of chairs around the blessing wall or net.
- a bible, or the passage printed from Bible Gateway.

Things to do:

- ✿ Download the Audio Recording #1 from the Study webpage. Test to see if you need speakers for your laptop so all can hear.
- ✿ Download and photocopy Audio Script #1. It is also printed in this Leaders Guide. Some listeners hear better when they have words and it is helpful for folk who find it hard to hear the recordings. Some like to take the script home for further study.
- ✿ Download and photocopy Participant Page. There is one page for the whole series. It has the prompts for conversation and suggestions for practice and reflection between meetings.
- ✿ Choose one or two of the “Where Were You When ...” Story Prompts and make sure you can play the video or song.
- ✿ Track the storytelling time and make sure you leave time for the Response. This time is key to strengthening the theological reflection.

Suggested direction for Leaders is in italics.

This session is designed for one hour with a recommended group of 6-8 participants. You will need more time for a larger group.

Session 1: Spiritual Memoir

Honouring the Sacred in Our Lives

Welcome & Gathering

Let us begin with a few moments of silence to quiet our minds, rest our bodies and bring ourselves fully to this time and space. At the end of one minute of quiet, I'll share a brief reading.

Silence

It's a good idea to time one minute so that the silence isn't too long or too short.

Reading: This Psalm speaks of our closeness with the Divine who is present in all the experiences of life. Read Psalm 139

Check In: Rose, Thorn, Bud

This is a time for participants to check in, make themselves present to the group and share their voice. If the group does not know each other well, begin by sharing names. Remind the group that in check-in we go around the circle and each one has a chance to speak. There is no cross-talk or discussion. We use the same check in each week. This allows for familiarity.

You might want to explain the purpose of a check in and then say something like: we will be using the same check in at the beginning of each session. You are invited to think about your week and share with the group either a rose, a thorn or a bud. Explain the meaning of each:

Rose, which is something good and beautiful

Thorn, which is something not so good or sticky

Bud, which is something promising, or hopeful

It is a good idea for the leader to begin to model a brief check in by sharing an experience of either a rose or a thorn or a bud.

Norms

Take five minutes as a group to discuss the norms or expectations that would make this group a good experience for all. Ask questions like these: What helps you get the most out of a group like this? What helps you feel comfortable in a small group? What agreements help make this time safe and the best it can be for all of us? Record the responses.

Listen to Audio Recording #1

Spiritual Memoir: Honouring the Sacred in Our Lives

Storytelling

If your session time is limited or the group is large, you might want to tell the group how much time there is for storytelling, making sure to leave time for the Response and Closing.

Where Were You When

Review these suggestions and choose one or two to prompt a round of where were you when ... You will find links to suggested videos or songs on the Study webpage. You'll know which time period is appropriate for your group or feel free to create your own "Where were you when ... " prompts.

1. Play a piece of music ... hit tune from 1945 ... See the study webpage for suggestions. Ask: What were you doing when victory was won?
2. Show video: Walk on the moon July 16, 1969. <https://youtu.be/RMINSD7MmT4> Recall something you were doing on earth during this time (or year).
3. Remember the 1972 Soviet Canadian Hockey Game? Show the video: <https://youtu.be/IMf2fAXPS1Q> Who was with you as you watched the game? Or - What else was going on for you in 1972?
4. On February 1, 2003, the Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated upon reentering Earth's atmosphere, killing all seven crew members. <https://youtu.be/1oBTzbKx0jo> Where were you when you heard the news?
5. Twin Towers - Sept. 11, 2001 - What were you doing that day?
6. "All You Need is Love" was a 1967 Beatles hit. Play the song. What do you remember about the song? What was your greatest 1967 celebration? Video <https://youtu.be/dsxtImDVMig>
7. JF Kennedy was shot Friday, November 22, 1963, at 12:30 p.m. Pass around a picture ... Where were you when you heard the news?

Response: Name These Stories Blessed

This response time is critical for connecting the stories of “what happened” to the story of “why” it was important. This connection is what makes spiritual memoir and it is the story of meaning and mystery. To transition into the response time, it might be helpful to ask the question and then offer a moment or two of silence for reflection.

✿ How does your memory of this event shape what you know of God? Of love? Or of faith or your spiritual journey?

Closing Spiritual Practice: “What is a Blessing?”

Visit the Study webpage for suggestions on creating a blessing wall/loom or blessing net. Download the sheet of biblical blessings, copy and cut out as many as you think you need for everyone in the group to have a blessing. Tuck or weave the blessings on the blessing wall/loom/net with clothespins. Each participant will choose a scripture blessings to take home after reading their blessing to the group.

Reading: *What is a blessing?*

What is a blessing?

It might be a silent gesture
a touch to the arm, a hand to the back.

It might be a formal action
the laying of hands, the sign of the cross.

What is a blessing?

It might be ordinary words
slipped into conversations, see (hashtag) #blessing

It might be liturgical expression
bestowing truth, and always generous.

Our hearts rise for a blessing.

Let there be longing.
Let there be yearning.
Let there be deepest desire. (*silence*)

Take a blessing from the blessing wall or loom or net *continued next page....*

This is your blessing.

It is yours, a blessing for you. (Janice MacLean, 2018)

Once everyone has chosen a blessing, invite each participant to read their blessing out loud. The group might respond with "amen" after each one reads.

Next Session (Participant Page)

In preparation for Session 2, review the Participant Page with the group. They are invited to bring a recipe, old photo, or an antique that has meaning. The prompt is to help participants begin to think of the spiritual aspect of what they choose to bring.

For Session 2

Family Recipes, Old Pictures & Antiques: Listen to Your Life

Bring: A family recipe, or a photo, or an antique that helps you tell a story about your roots or how you have come to be the person you are.

Prompt: Why is your recipe or old photo significant? What does it reveal about who you are, your spiritual journey, your values, or the path/direction of your life?

Visit: The Spiritual Memoir recordings on www.prayerbench.ca to hear or read spiritual memoir stories.

- Adrienne MacKay - [For the Love of Hats](#)
- Breanna Sharpe - [Recipes from the Family Table](#)
- Roberta MacConnell - [A Profound Spiritual Event](#)

Preparation for Session 2

Family Recipes, Pictures & Antiques: Listen to Your Life

Leader Notes & Preparation for Session 2

HERE IS THE WEBLINK & PASSWORD TO THE STUDY RESOURCES

WEBLINK: <https://prayerbench.ca/storytellers-small-group-study/>

PASSWORD: Memoir#1

You will need:

- a blessing wall/loom or net which is used in each of the closing spiritual practices
- as many small mirrors as you can find to place on the wall/loom/net (after this just called wall!)
- the words or video for the song, "I Was There to Hear Your Morning Cry." Please see the Study webpage for a video and link to lyrics. It is in Voices United #644.
- a circle of chairs around the blessing wall.
- a bible, or the passage printed from Bible Gateway.

Things to do:

- ✻ Download the Audio Recording #2 from the Study webpage. Test to see if you need speakers for your laptop so all can hear.
- ✻ Download and photocopy Audio Script #2. Some listeners hear better when they have words and it is helpful for folk who find it hard to hear the recordings. Some like to take the script home for further study.
- ✻ Download and photocopy Participant Page for anyone who is new this week. It has the prompts for conversation and suggestions for practice and reflection between meetings.
- ✻ Track the storytelling time and make sure you leave time for the Response. This strengthens the theological reflection.

Suggested direction for Leaders is in italics.

This session is designed for one hour with a recommended group of 6-8 participants. You will need more time for a larger group.

Session 2: Family Recipes, Pictures & Antiques -Listen to Your Life

Gathering

Let us begin with a few moments of silence to quiet our minds, rest our bodies and bring ourselves fully to this time and space. At the end of one minute of quiet, I'll share a brief reading or we'll sing a song.

Silence

It's a good idea to time one minute so that the silence isn't too long or too short.

Reading: In the ordinary happenings of life, and in the astonishing events of life, and in the times when we say, "Why God?," God is with us. Read: Romans 8:35-39.

Check in: Rose, Thorn, Bud

You might want to explain again the purpose of a check in and then say something like: we will be using the same check as last week. You are invited to look back over your week and share with the group either a rose, a thorn or a bud. Explain the meaning of each:

Rose, which is something good and beautiful

Thorn, which is something not so good or sticky

Bud, which is something promising, or hopeful

It is a good idea for the leader to begin to model a brief check in by sharing an experience of either a rose or a thorn or a bud.

Listen to Audio Recording #2

Family Recipes, Old Pictures & Antiques: Listen to Your Life

Storytelling: *If your session time is limited or the group is large, you might want to tell the group how much time there is for storytelling, making sure to leave time for the Response and Closing.*

Each participant is invited to share the story behind the recipe, old photograph or antique they have chosen to help tell a story about their roots or how they have come to be the person they are. *It might be helpful for the leader to begin.*

Response: Name These Stories Blessed

This response time is critical for connecting the stories of “what happened” to the story of “why” it was important. This connection is what makes spiritual memoir and it is the story of meaning and mystery. To transition into the response time, it might be helpful to ask the question and then offer a moment or two of silence for reflection.

***** Where did you hear grace or a blessing today?

Closing Spiritual Practice: “That was a Blessing”

Place mirrors on the blessing wall or in the blessing net in such a way that participants can see their reflection in a mirror. It might be helpful to read the blessing in two voices.

Reading: *We Come From Love*

We come from Love
and we are blessed.

**And we are blessed
when we are born.**

Each day we live
we yearn for Love
**We yearn for Love
and we are blessed.**

Each blessing is a portion of the grace of God
and every time we say, “That was a blessing”
we have been given a sighting, hope, reminder
that we are whole
that we are loved
that we are good.

Our hearts rise for a blessing.

Each one is invited to go to the blessing wall/net and look in a mirror.
We are blessed. We are whole. We are loved. We are good. (Janice MacLean, 2018)

After all have returned to their chairs, you might want to sing, “I Was There to Hear Your Born-ing Cry” (John Ylvisaker) Voice United, #644. See study page for links to lyrics and video.

Next Session (Participant Page)

Review the Participant Page for the next session.

For Session 3***Quilts and Other Precious Possessions: Making Meaning in Your Life***

Bring: a quilt (hooked rug, or other creative art) or other precious possession that helps you tell a story about an experience or gift that brought meaning, purpose or value to your life.

Prompt: Why is your your quilt or your precious possession important for you? What is it telling you about your life? How is it a container for your spiritual memoir? How is God speaking to your life in this moment, through this quilt or precious possession?

Visit: The Spiritual Memoir recordings on www.prayerbench.ca to hear spiritual or read memoir stories.

- Karen Thompson, [Every Quilt Tells a Story](#).
- Bill Redden, [This Farm](https://prayerbench.ca/project/bill-redden-farm/) <https://prayerbench.ca/project/bill-redden-farm/>
- Cathy MacLean, [The Milk House](#)
- Marilyn Burrell, [Bonnie's Story](#)

Preparation for Session 3

Quilts and Other Precious Possessions: Making Meaning in Your Life

Leader Notes & Preparation for Session 3

HERE IS THE WEBLINK & PASSWORD TO THE STUDY RESOURCES

WEBLINK: <https://prayerbench.ca/storytellers-small-group-study/>

PASSWORD: Memoir#1

You will need:

- a blessing wall or blessing wall used in each of the closing spiritual practices.
- an envelope for each participant with a sheet of paper inside with the blessing to carry into the week,
- a circle of chairs around the blessing wall or net.
- a bible, or the passage printed from Bible Gateway.
- hymnbooks, if you wish to have singing at the beginning or end.

Things to do:

- ✿ Prepare an envelope for each participant with a blessing written on a piece of paper. Use the same blessing in each envelope. Participants open their envelopes and read blessing together. See closing spiritual practice.
- ✿ Download the Audio Recording #3 from the Study webpage. Test to see if you need speakers for your laptop so all can hear.
- ✿ Download and photocopy Audio Script #3. Some listeners hear better when they have words and it is helpful for folk who find it hard to hear the recordings. Some like to take the script home for further study.
- ✿ Download and photocopy Participant Page, if needed. It has the prompts for conversation and suggestions for practice and reflection between meetings.
- ✿ Track the storytelling time and make sure you leave time for the Response. This strengthens the spiritual memoir.
- ✿ Arrange for music if you decide have singing during the gathering or closing.

Suggested direction for Leaders is in italics.

This session is designed for one hour with a recommended group of 6-8 participants. You will need more time for a larger group.

Session 3: Quilts and Other Precious Possessions Making Meaning

Gathering

Let us begin with a few moments of silence to quiet our minds, rest our bodies and bring ourselves fully to this time and space. At the end of one minute of quiet, I'll share a brief reading.

Silence

Reading: Spiritual memoir tells us of God's presence on life's journey. Read Psalm 121 or the following verse of a hymn by John Douglas Sutherland Campbell, who was the 4th Governor General of Canada.

Unto the hills around do I lift up
My longing eyes;
O whence for me shall my salvation come,
From whence arise?
From God the Lord doth come my certain aid,
From God the Lord, who heav'n and earth hath made. (John Douglas Sutherland Campbell)

Check in: Rose, Thorn, Bud

You are invited to look back over your week and share with the group either a rose, a thorn or a bud. Explain the meaning of each:

Rose, which is something good and beautiful
Thorn, which is something not so good or sticky
Bud, which is something promising, or hopeful

Listen to Audio Recording #3

Quilts and Other Precious Possessions: Making Meaning in Your Life

Storytelling:

If your session time is limited or the group is large, you might want to tell the group how much time there is for storytelling, making sure to leave time for the Response and Closing.

Each participant is invited to share the story of the quilt or other precious possession they have chosen to bring, and how it highlights an experience or gift that brought meaning or purpose to their life.

Response: Name These Stories Blessed

This response time is critical for connecting the stories of “what happened” to the story of “why” it was important. This connection is what makes spiritual memoir and it is the story of meaning and mystery. To transition into the response time, it might be helpful to ask the question and then offer a moment or two of silence for reflection.

- * What did you hear today about how God is speaking / moving in the life of participants through a quilt or precious possession?
- * What examples did you hear of how these objects help bring meaning to the lives of their owners?

Closing Spiritual Practice

Participants are invited to go to the Prayer Wall and take an envelope containing a printed blessing. Without opening the envelope, participants hold the blessing in their hands during the meditative reading. They will read the blessing together at the end of the meditation.

Reading: *Carry This Blessing*

Carry this blessing into your week.

Bring to your heart all you know will be part of your week.

These are things you do every week — *(silence)*

Let your blessing carry you in this part of your week.

Carry this blessing into your week.

Bring to your heart the things that are specific to this week.

Perhaps it is an appointment, a meeting, a visit, a task — *(silence)*

Let your blessing carry you in this part of your week.

Carry this blessing into your week.

What else will unfold this week?

Will there be pleasant surprises? Or perhaps a disappointment?

Will there be new opportunities? Or bad news?

Perhaps a spur of the moment adventure? A fit of uncertainty?

Let your blessing carry you in all circumstances.

Our hearts rise for a blessing.

Each one is invited to open their envelope and read the blessing in one voice.

(The blessing is read.)

We are blessed.

We go on our way, knowing we are blessed in all circumstances.

(Carry the blessing home and put in a place where it will be noticed throughout the week ahead.)

(Janice MacLean, 2018)

If you wish, close by singing a verse of two of two or three hymns that had an spiritual impact on participants.

Next Session (Participant Page)

Review the participant page for the next session. You might also want to decided as a group if you wish to have a time of fellowship at the closing meeting. You might want to try out some of the recipes that were shared in Session 2!

For Session 4 Diaries, Letters & Commonplace Books: Living Fully

Bring: a diary, a letter, a book, a family proverb or saying, an entry from the Family Bible that made a difference in your life and passed on wisdom or understanding.

Prompt: Who wrote it? How did / does the letter, diary etc, influence your life, your faith or spiritual journey, your values, the path / direction of your life? Why is it significant? What wisdom does it pass on?

Visit: The Spiritual Memoir recordings on www.prayerbench.ca to hear spiritual or read memoir stories.

- Vera Turner, [Letter from the Front](#)
- Karen Thompson, [A Legacy with Words](#)
- Eldon Hay, [Mrs. Hume: Midwife](#)
- John Wilson, [Roots Running Deep \(Genealogy\)](#)

Preparation for Session 4

Diaries, Letters & Commonplace Books: Living Fully

Leader Notes & Preparation for Session 4

HERE IS THE WEBLINK & PASSWORD TO THE STUDY RESOURCES

WEBLINK: <https://prayerbench.ca/storytellers-small-group-study/>

PASSWORD: Memoir#1

You will need:

- a blessing wall used in each of the closing spiritual practices.
- small pieces and papers for writing prayers to place on the blessing wall. Pens or pencils.
- a circle of chairs around the blessing wall .
- a bible, or the passage printed from Bible Gateway.
- Hymnbook, if you choose to use songs in the opening or closing. I suggest asking for suggestions that had a spiritual impact on participants.

Things to do:

- ✿ Prepare small sheet of paper (2"x2") for the closing spiritual practice. Each participant needs at least three pieces of paper.
- ✿ Download the Audio Recording #4 from the Study webpage. Test to see if you need speakers for your laptop so all can hear.
- ✿ Download and photocopy Audio Script #4. Some listeners hear better when they have words and it is helpful for folk who find it hard to hear the recordings. Some like to take the script home for further study.
- ✿ Watch the storytelling time and make sure you leave time for the Response. This strengthens the theological reflection.

Suggested direction for Leaders is in italics.

This session is designed for one hour with a recommended group of 6-8 participants. You will need more time with a larger group.

Session 4: Diaries, Letters & Commonplace Books Living Fully

Gathering

Let us begin with a few moments of silence to quiet our minds, rest our bodies and bring ourselves fully to this time and space. At the end of one minute of quiet, I'll share a brief reading.

Silence

Reading: Recall a saying you grew up with. Perhaps something like: "A Squeaky wheel gets the grease." Or "Better late than never." (*You might want to use proverbs or wisdom saying you are familiar with, or ask for a few examples.* Our reading is from the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs: Proverbs 3:1-8

Check in: Rose, Thorn, Bud

You are invited to look back over your week and share with the group either a rose, a thorn or a bud. Explain the meaning of each:

Rose, which is something good and beautiful

Thorn, which is something not so good or sticky

Bud, which is something promising, or hopeful

Listen to Audio Recording #4

Diaries, Letters & Commonplace Books: Living Fully

Storytelling:

If your session time is limited or the group is large, you might want to tell the group how much time there is for storytelling, making sure to leave time for the Response and Closing.

Each participant is invited to share the story of the diary/journal, letter, family bible, or saying or proverb they have chosen to bring, and what wisdom or understand it it reveals or what difference it made in their life.

Response: Name These Stories Blessed

This response time is critical for connecting the stories of "what happened" to the story of "why" it was important. This connection is what makes spiritual memoir and it is the story of meaning

and mystery. To transition into the response time, it might be helpful to ask the question and then offer a moment or two of silence for reflection.

- ✿ What did you hear about what people are living for?
- ✿ What did you hear about what is keeping people from living fully?
- ✿ How does your heart want to respond to all you have heard and said?

Closing Spiritual Practice:

You will need small pieces of paper and pens so participants can write prayers.

After a sneeze, we say

“Bless you.”

Before a meal we pray

“Bless this food.”

When feeling empathy, we say

“Bless your heart.”

A blessing calls forth goodness.

What is a blessing?

A blessing weaves a Presence round us.

A blessing recalls the Original Goodness in everything.

A blessing reminds us we are Beloved.

Let us bless someone in need.

(names or initials are written and placed on the blessing wall or in the net.)

Let us bless a place or situation in our world.

(prayers are written and placed on the blessing wall or in the net.)

Let us bless one another.

(standing in a circle, the leader blesses the person on their right with the words, NAME, we bless you. This person turns to the person on their right, NAME, we bless you. Continue around the circle.)

Janice MacLean, 2018

End with singing a blessing if you are enjoying food together. Complete the participant evaluations.

Audio Script #1

Spiritual Memoir: Honouring the Sacred in Our Lives

The Confessions of Saint Augustine, a book written more than fifteen hundred years ago, tells the story of this early church theologian's long struggle with faith. It is considered the first spiritual memoir of this kind ever recorded. I love these words; listen to the deep emotion and intimacy:

"Late have I loved you, O Beauty, so ancient and so new, late have I loved you. For behold you were within me, and I outside; and I sought you outside and in my unloveliness fell upon those lovely things which you have made. You were with me, and I was not with you. I was kept from you by those things, yet had they not been in you, they would not have been at all. You called and cried to me to break open my deafness and you sent forth your beams and you shone upon me and chased away my blindness. You breathed fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and now do pant for you."

Augustine discovers God was there even when Augustine didn't know it. "You were with me, and I was not with you."

A similar sentiment is expressed by the Psalmist in Psalm 139:

"O God you have come searching for me. You know me inside out I am encircled by your presence ... Nothing about me has been hidden from your presence." (Ancient Songs Sung Anew, Lynn Bauman)

Both the Psalmist and early church theologian affirm that God was present in the whole of our life. God is there before "our morning cry" and God is still there, even after our "eyelids close in death." (I Was There to Hear Your Morning Cry)

Spiritual memoir is theological reflection. It is our spiritual reflection on what happened in the ordinary moments and "outsized" events of our lives. It is making connections between an event or experience and the mystery, the preciousness, the gift, the teaching and learning as a result of what happened.

Sometimes we know in the moment that something wonderful is happening. Other times, it is only as we look back we realize what a powerful effect or lesson this experience had on the unfolding of our life. Elizabeth Andrew, a memoir teacher, says

spiritual memoir **“strives to link our seemingly small lives to some broader truth, some vaster mystery.”**¹

Now, don’t let the words “spiritual memoir” or “theological reflection” put you off.

Abigail Johnson, in her book *Reflecting with God* writes: “Basically, we are theologically reflecting when we ask, “What does God want me to learn in this?” or “What does God want me to know from this?” She says - we don’t need to use explicit theological language or be biblical scholars. We don’t need to be particularly pious or religious.² We just need to think about how God is with us in all those moments that make up our life.

In this group, you will be invited (if you wish) to share stories. Each session will offer a prompt to help remind you of a significant or ordinary moment in your life. These prompts will help lead you a story. Perhaps you’ll bring an old family recipe, a photo or a family antique to help share a story that shaped who you are today. Perhaps you’ll bring a quilt or other precious possession that will help share a story of something that shaped your values or brings meaning to who you are in this world. Perhaps you have a diary, a family bible, an old letter or journal that is precious to you because it passes on wisdom or experience that is important to you and to generations to come.

Wisdom teachers say the shortest distance between two people is a story. I hope you’ll make interesting spiritual discoveries as you practice spiritual memoir. And I hope you find your hearts warmed as you walk along together as story tellers and listeners during these sessions.

¹ from her website: <http://www.spiritualmemoir.com/>

² Abigail Johnson, *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Group*, Alban Institute. 2004. p.32

Audio Script #2

Family Recipes, Old Photos & Antiques: Listening to Your Life

I have my grandmother's recipe for sugar cookies. I've never made them. Perhaps I will some day. I'm not really sure why it was so important to me to get the recipe from my mother and put it where I knew I wouldn't lose it.

I'm not sure why the recipe is so important but, whenever I ask people to think about family recipes that are part of their spiritual memoir, this is the first recipe that comes to mind — my grandmother's sugar cookies.

What is it about this recipe that seems to hold a piece of who I am? What memories are stirred when I think about these cookies? Just recalling the taste connects me with this grandmother who died when I was nine years old. I don't have as many clear memories of her as my other grandmother. But I have a connection through the sugar cookies. They tell me something about about her and who she was in my life.

I know instinctively they hold a piece of who I am. They are a piece of my spiritual memoir.

The writer, Frederick Buechner, advises: "Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace."³

Listen to your life. Spiritual memoir is more than simply relating our memories to others. It is a journey of discovery. As we remember, we learn more about ourselves, our spiritual journey, and the patterns of our lives that have lead to our spiritual growth.

In the simple, ordinary stories you share today through recipes, old photos, or a family antique, there are patterns, gifts, and spiritual teachings; you are listening to your life. Listen for grace - those moments of life's learning, when there was gift, when there was a sense of the Sacred present in Love. Wonder about the gifts hidden in your stories.

³ Frederick Buechner, *Now and Then: A Memoir of Vocation*. Harper, 1991.

Audio Script #3

Quilts and Other Precious Possessions: Making Meaning in Your Life

If I was in your circle today, I'd bring a quilt to share with you. I'd tell you it was made by my grandmother, the one I called More Nana. Yes, that was her name. I was the first grandchild. We lived for a while with Nana and Papa. And then I got to know my maternal grandparents, so I named them More Nana and More Papa!

More Nana's quilt was made quickly, with flour sacks as backing, whatever fabric she had at hand, and less than artistic stitches. More Nana made quilts when they were needed for warmth on a bed. Her quilts were simple and practical.

The quilt tells me something of the substance of her life. It speaks to her values and to her nature. This quilt is more than a precious possession, it is an inheritance of her soul.

And it shows me something of who I am. What meaning, or importance or value does it bring to my life? It connects me to a different time. I love that the quilt backing was made of re-cycled flour sacks. I love that the quilt was made for use on a bed when a blanket was needed. This speaks to my desire for simplicity. That's a value hard to achieve in my own life, but the longing is there.

The quilt is also an icon pointing to my love of the Psalms and the one I most associate with my grandmother - Psalm 121 - Unto the Hills. She was an organist. I remember singing Psalms on Sunday afternoon from the back of the little black hymnary.

So it is more than a quilt, it's a symbol that tells me something about my own values and desires; it reminds me of the sustaining power of the Psalms in my spiritual journey.

Take some time to think about what you brought today. It has a story, but think deeply about the reason you brought it. What is it saying about *you*, your life choices, your values, your struggles or what influenced your life? What might it be saying about your spiritual journey? You brought it today for a reason and that makes it a container for spiritual memoir.

Audio Script #4

Diaries, Letters & Commonplace Books: Living Fully

Diaries, letters and commonplace books are containers for memoir. They contain short stories of lived experience, and offer a glimpse of the meaning of life in a moment for both the writer and the one who treasures the writing.

I want to tell you what Commonplace Books are. They were developed in England in the 1700's as a way of collecting quotes, passages, sayings of other people. I have a book that I received when I was a young minister. It was compiled by an elderly woman on my pastoral charge, Kathleen Cowling. My book says it is #122. She wrote at least 122 books! I treasure it because I admire the effort and the time it took to fill page after page of cursive writing with her choice of words she felt important for me to read. It's a book of her wisdom written in the words of others.

Do you write down wisdom sayings or quotes that speak to your life? Do you remember proverbs or sayings your mother or father used that come to your own tongue in certain circumstances? Is there a special reason poems or bible verses hold wisdom for you? Do you treasure letters that tell of someone's life story and that story holds wisdom or guidance for you?

Here is a poem I have in my collection.

If you want to identify me,
Ask me not where I live,
Or what I like to eat,
Or how I comb my hair.
But ask me what I am living for,
In detail,
And ask me what I think is keeping me
From living fully
For the thing I want to live for. - Thomas Merton

What are you living for? Our spiritual memoir is a collection of stories about what we are living for - and - when we are truthful, it is also the story of what is keeping us from living fully for the thing we want to live for.

I hope you brought a diary or family saying to share. Perhaps you brought a letter that fascinates or inspires you. Tell the story to your group, but then pause and take some time to reflect on why you brought it and what it says about what you are living for?

Participant Page

There are many containers for spiritual memoir. Family recipes and family bibles, genealogy and photos, quilts and precious possessions have a story. Often they lead us to a story. They also invite us to reflect on a life's learning, or mystery or our purpose. As we reflect, they also tell us about God, faith or our spiritual journey.

For each session, you are invited to bring an object or a picture or story about it. It may be helpful to read over the prompts before choosing what to bring and to help you share its story. This helps you reflect on the meaning of what you bring. It is your spiritual memoir.

You may also want to prepare for each session by listening to the suggested recordings and reading posts on the Spiritual Memoir web page at the Prayer Bench.

For Session 2

Family Recipes, Old Pictures & Antiques: Listen to Your Life

Bring: A recipe, or a photo, or an antique that helps you tell a story about your roots or how you have come to be the person you are.

Prompt: Why is your recipe or old photo significant? What does it reveal about who you are, your spiritual journey, your values, or the path/direction of your life?

Visit: The Spiritual Memoir recordings on www.prayerbench.ca to hear or read spiritual memoir stories.

- Adrienne MacKay - [For the Love of Hats](#)
- Breanna Sharpe - [Recipes from the Family Table](#)
- Roberta MacConnell - [A Profound Spiritual Event](#)

For Session 3

Quilts and Other Precious Possessions: Making Meaning in Your Life

Bring: A quilt (hooked rug, or other creative art) or other precious possession that helps you tell a story about an experience or gift that brought meaning, purpose or value to your life.

Prompt: Why is your quilt or your precious possession important for you? What is it telling you about your life? How is it a container for your spiritual memoir? How is God speaking to your life in this moment, through this quilt or precious possession?

Visit: The Spiritual Memoir recordings on www.prayerbench.ca to hear spiritual or read memoir stories.

- Karen Thompson, Every Quilt Tells a Story.
- Bill Redden, This Farm <https://prayerbench.ca/project/bill-redden-farm/>
- Cathy MacLean, The Milk House
- Marilyn Burrell, Bonnie's Story

For Session 4 *Diaries, Letters & Commonplace Books: Living Fully*

Bring: A diary, a letter, a book, a family proverb or saying, an entry from the Family Bible that made a difference in your life and passed on wisdom or understanding.

Prompt: Who wrote it? How did / does the letter, diary etc, influence your life, your faith or spiritual journey, your values, the path / direction of your life? Why is it significant? What wisdom does it pass on?

Visit: The Spiritual Memoir recordings on www.prayerbench.ca to hear spiritual or read memoir stories.

- Vera Turner, Letter from the Front
- Karen Thompson, A Legacy with Words
- Eldon Hay, Mrs. Hume: Midwife
- John Wilson, Roots Running Deep (Genealogy)