



## Getting Started

Our view of the world is profoundly affected by the stories we hear and the stories we tell ourselves. Is the story of the world a comedy? tragedy? random chaos? Is there evil and good in the world? Which ultimately wins or are they forever in balance?

What are the stories you grew up with and how have they impacted who you are today? What are the stories that the world needs today?

Christianity says that the fundamental story is the “gospel” which means “good news.” But for a lot of people, Christians are anything but good news. They are judgmental, fearful, or naively positive.

These don’t offer much of an alternative to plausible other worldviews that are out there: We are simply the latest species to emerge in a battle for survival of the fittest, life is short so get what you can, it’s all karma, a great balancing act, and you get what is coming to you—good or bad.

Christians haven’t always been negative—many universities, hospitals, and orphanages were started by Christians who felt so loved by God they had to give it away to others.

This discussion guide is about the stories we hear, a story in the Bible, and about how Christians might be “good news.”

*“Those who do not have power over the stories that dominate their lives, power to retell them, rethink them, deconstruct them, joke about them, and change them as times change, truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts.”*

Salman Rushdie

*“We are the stories we tell ourselves.”*

Joan Didion

### Choose one

What is a children’s story that affects who you are today?

Share a story of a worldview that your parents helped shape that you are now questioning.

What is a positive and a negative way you would characterize Christians?

What story do you think society needs to hear today?



## The Story of the Loving Father

**11** “There was a man who had two sons. **12** The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

**13** “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. **14** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. **16** He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

**17** “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! **18** I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ **20** So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

**21** “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

**22** “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23** Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. **24** For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

**25** “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. **27** ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

**Jesus often spoke in the form of short stories or parables. Rather than long lists of dos and don’ts, Jesus used stories to capture the essence of the “good news” that he was bringing. Like all good stories, they have crossed time and cultures and still resonate today. One of the most popular parables is what has become known to us as the Prodigal (wayward) Son. It tells the story of two sons—one who is wild and another who lives by the law, and a father who is always looking and ready to welcome everyone with a party. Some have suggested that the parable should be called the Loving Father. (Verses from Luke 15:11-32, NIV)**

**28** “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. **29** But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

**31** “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. **32** But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

**Who do you identify with in this story?**

**What’s the conversation at breakfast the next morning between the father and the two sons?**



## Going Deeper

Stories are powerful because we find ourselves in them, living through the lives of the characters. Have you ever rushed through the end of a book because you needed to help the main character get through the situation?

What if you put yourself in the story of the prodigal son? What do you see and hear?

### Choose one

What do you think happened after the prodigal son was home for a year?

In the story of the prodigal son, who are you?

If Christians truly were "good news," what story would they offer the world?

## The Journey Ahead

What story are you telling about the world and your place in it? What is another story you would like to explore?

One of the messages of the gospel is letting go and letting God pick up the slack. If you could give up a stress in your life, what would it be?

Storytelling is an act of vulnerability. Next time someone shares their story, find a detail that resonates with you and affirm it.

## To Learn More



*Vanishing Grace: What Ever Happened to the Good News?* By Philip Yancey [A discussion of why Christianity isn't seen as "good news" by many today and the good news it does have to offer.]

*Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale* by Fredrick Buechner [An exploration of the way the Bible tells difficult, hopeful and true lessons.]

*Friedman's Fables* by Edwin Friedman [A collection of modern-day fables with not-so-clear endings. It comes with great discussion questions.]



Ted Talks on storytelling:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew\\_stanton\\_the\\_clues\\_to\\_a\\_great\\_story?language=en#t-1129910](https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_stanton_the_clues_to_a_great_story?language=en#t-1129910)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9LCwI5iErE>

See how other people share their stories: <https://player.fm/series/the-moth-podcast>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-bible-project/id1050832450>