

Welcome to the Practice of Story ~ USG SGM January, 2025

drawn from Soul Matters materials, see the full packet for more of all of these elements
www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com

Ever notice that when politicians talk about accomplishments, problems or legislation our eyes glaze over until they bring in a real person who has been affected for better or worse and they tell their story. Then it gets real. That's the power of story.

Chalice Lighting Stories are told as spells for binding the world together. - John Rouse

Check-in *Share your highs and lows since we last met focusing on what drains you and what lifts you up. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

Introduction

It's dangerous to tell yourself stories are tame. To treat them as something that lives only between the covers of a book. As something that can be easily kept on a shelf, taken down and put back up as we see fit. Stories are wilder than that. And more powerful. This month is all about remembering that power.

Indeed, who of us hasn't felt controlled by a story? Stuck in a story? Hopeless about the way our story will end up? Simply put, our stories often write us as much as we write them. The power of story plays out on a social level as well. Just think about our cultural struggles with economic or racial justice. The unconscionable income gap is often described as "natural" or "the result of complex global dynamics over which we have little control." Similarly, the story of race in our country is too often told as an "entrenched" story or minimized with a story about "how far we have come." The aim of all these cultural narratives is the same: to undermine action, and worse, to undermine our belief that things can change.

Which is why it's so important to remember that the ability to tell a new story has been at the center of our faith from the beginning. We rarely think of our UU history this way, but one of the beliefs that gave birth to our religion was the belief that human beings are authors of their stories, not passive characters in them.

All around our UU founders, people were saying that God had "[predestined](#)" not just the big story of humanity, but our smaller individual stories too. Some of us were slotted for heaven and others for hell. And there was nothing any of us could do about it. Shakespeare said, "All the world's a stage." Our spiritual ancestors went one step better and said, "All the world is an improv performance! Our job is to hop on the stage, pick up the storyline handed to us, and then put our own stamp on it!"

So fate and freedom. Are you an actor conforming to the scripts of others? Or have you found your way to becoming the director and screenwriter of your life? How are you struggling right now to regain control of your storyline? How are you and your friends working to regain control of the storyline of your community, and our country?

Our Spiritual Exercises

It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of *thinking* and into the space of *doing*, these exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say *to us*! Pick the exercise that speaks to you the most. **Come to your group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did, how it surprised you and what gift it gave you.**

Option A - Your Reverse Bucket List: The Story of the Amazing Things You've Already Done

January is the time of New Year's resolutions and making plans for how we can make the story of our life better, happier or more impressive. One form of New Year's resolutions is a bucket list: a list of all the amazing things you want to do before you die. But there's a problem with this. By focusing on how we want to make our life story amazing in the future, we can easily lose sight of how our story is *already* amazing.

This is where a *Reverse Bucket List* comes in. A reverse bucket list is what it sounds like: the opposite of a bucket list. Instead of looking forward, it looks back. The gift of a reverse bucket list is how it makes us grateful for our life story *as it is*. With all this in mind, give it a try yourself this month. For inspiration and guidance, check out examples [here](#) and [here](#). In particular, we encourage you to lean on [these five questions](#) as you think about what you want to include on your list:

1. What have you done that's interesting or different? (By your own standards, of course.)
2. What have you got right with relationships?
3. What's something you feel especially proud of?
4. How have you shown up for someone important—either yourself or someone you care for?
5. What's a hard thing you managed to see through and overcome?

Option B - The Stories Held by Your Body

It's not just our homes that carry and contain our stories. It's [our bodies too](#). A scar tells the story of a courageous moment, and one equally laced with fear. Our wrinkles speak the tale of time and contain the gift of a many-chaptered life. Our aches can tell stories of endurance or neglect. Our curves can speak stories of self-love or shame.

To honor our [story-laden bodies](#), pick one aspect of your body and explore the story it holds by...

- Telling its story in poetry or prose.
- Writing a thank you letter to it, for all it enabled you to experience and/or for all it did to care for you.
- Writing an apology letter to it, for how you may not have appreciated, loved or cared for it as much as you wish you had.
- Write up what you think it would say to you if it could speak. Or how a conversation between the two of you would go.

Come to your group ready to share your written piece as well as how this exercise altered or enriched your relationship with your body.

Companion Pieces Option C - Which Companion Piece Speaks to You?

Sometimes we come across a quote, song, article or movie and it perfectly captures what's going on for us right now or allows us to view our current circumstances in a new light. With this in mind, spend some time this month going through the Companion Pieces below to find the one piece that speaks most powerfully to you. Come to your group ready to share the piece you picked, why it called to you & the journey it took you on. (In addition to using these for individual spiritual exercises they could be read aloud as quotations)

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. - Maya Angelou

I now see how owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we will ever do. - Brené Brown

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](#)

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](#)

Storytelling is a way to give someone an experience they haven't had yet, or maybe didn't even know was possible. - [adrienne maree brown](#)

Those without power risk everything to tell their story and must. Someone, somewhere will hear your story and decide to fight, to live and refuse compromise. - [Laura Hershey](#)

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

A story is a trick for sneaking a message into the fortified citadel of the human mind. - Jonathan Gottschall

Remember, you don't fear people whose stories you know. - Margaret Wheatley

Questions

Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go.

1. In your family of origin, what story was told about you? 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 "good" one? How has that story about you lived on, either by supporting your growth and relationships or by hindering them?
2. What story told by or about your ancestors has shaped or supported you the most?
3. What do you leave out of the telling of your life story that wants to be let back in?
4. When it comes to the story of your life right now, which best describes you: A [character](#) in it? The [author](#) of it? The [editor](#) of it?
5. What is one story you hope will be told at your funeral?

Sitting in Silence *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts.*

Sharing/Deep Listening *Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.*

Reflection and Gratitude *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Consider lifting up one comment or experience for which you are particularly grateful.*

Singing (or watching a video of someone else singing) Each of the [theme-based playlists](#) is organized as a journey of sorts, so consider listening from beginning to end and using it as a personal musical meditation. Click [HERE](#) for the **Spotify playlist**. Click [HERE](#) for the **YouTube playlist**.

Extinguishing the Chalice - Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten. - Attributed to G.K. Chesterton

