



Finding Your Stories of Faith

Guided Workbook To Help You Uncover the
Stories You Hear and the Stories You're Creating



FIRST CHURCH
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH *of* SAN DIEGO

 A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

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How does the Spirit move through you?

Our connection with the Divine is a gift for us to cherish and share with those around us. But that's not always easy for us to do.

When it comes to weighty emotions and powerful experiences, it can be difficult to find the right words to express ourselves. And that is certainly true when it comes to our faith story. That's why we've developed this guide to help you uncover new ways to connect with your spirituality while developing confidence to share your faith with those around you.

Each week includes a scripture to meditate on, a theme to connect to, and prompts to allow you to explore different forms of expression. The chosen scriptures contain stories that uncover the ways that people of the past found redeeming grace that led to undeniable change. Our hope is that you discover within these stories that same redeeming grace.

As you fill these pages, we hope that you will claim your spiritual life – where you've been, where you are, and where you hope to grow – so that your story might also be one of redeeming grace and undeniable change for the better: for you, your family, and friends, for the benefit of your community, and for the hope of the world.

~ Rev. Trudy D. Robinson

How to Use This Book

This book is structured into six sections – one per week. Each week includes an overarching theme, scripture for you to meditate upon, and prompts that invite you to deliberately consider how the Spirit is moving around you.

The prompts may be completed in any order, but we encourage you to do one exercise a day, so you have space to think more deeply about the scripture and theme. Our hope is that these exercises will help you slow down and tend to your spirit throughout the entire week. It's not about what you do or don't do, but how your spirit is nurtured and expressed as you develop your spiritual voice.

Of course, the resulting story is *yours* – so don't feel boxed in by these prompts. If there is another way that you'd like to express yourself, please do so.

We also encourage you to share your resulting art, words, and story with others. We've provided a QR code for each week that you can follow to share your story with our community of faith, as well as a recommended hashtag that you can use on social media. This way, we can collectively inspire those around us while developing the confidence and skill to articulate our faith.

If you ever have a question or would like to connect, we're here!
info@fumcsd.org | 619-297-4366 | fumcsd.org

Tips for Writing Prayers & Meditations

The final prompt of each week is writing a personal prayer or meditation that connects the scriptural theme to your life. If this is new to you – or if you're unfamiliar with a given week's format – don't be discouraged. This takes time and practice. Here are some tips to help you build confidence.

1. Choose a time and location where you're alert and free of distractions.
2. Before you put words on the page, share your intention out loud and explore your feelings and thoughts.
3. Allow yourself to sit and ponder – and be ok with silence. Sometimes it takes a while to “hear” your heart and mind.
4. Don't get too caught up in the words – you don't need to imitate a preacher or author, you can (and should!) use your unique voice and spiritual language.
5. Remember: Prayer and meditation aren't about perfection, they're about connection.

Trying a new style each week will help you grow your spiritual muscle but will require some patience and thought. Keep trying and you'll likely find it gets a bit easier each time.

1 | The Story of Proximity

This week's Scripture: Mark 5:25-34 (CEB)

A woman was there who had been bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a lot under the care of many doctors, and had spent everything she had without getting any better. In fact, she had gotten worse. Because she had heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his clothes. She was thinking, "If I can just touch his clothes, I'll be healed." Her bleeding stopped immediately, and she sensed in her body that her illness had been healed.

At that very moment, Jesus recognized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

His disciples said to him, "Don't you see the crowd pressing against you? Yet you ask, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus looked around carefully to see who had done it.

The woman, full of fear and trembling, came forward. Knowing what had happened to her, she fell down in front of Jesus and told him the whole truth. He responded, "Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace, healed from your disease."

How Proximity Shapes Your Spiritual Story

Being in proximity to someone affects who we are. If we hang out with angry people, we become angry; funny people, we laugh a lot; intelligent and thoughtful people, our thinking changes. Or, as might be appropriate for our times, if we live in an echo chamber, we won't learn anything new. There is proximity in this scripture. The healing in this story took place because the woman put herself in proximity to Jesus. She was intentional in getting closer to him. This story reminds us that who we choose to surround ourselves with matters, and we can determine who we move toward, invite in, and learn from.

Create (and Share!) Your Story

Using the prompts below reflect on how the Spirit moves in you based on proximity: the people you encounter in your daily life, the family you live with, the friends you enjoy, and the faith that is embodied in others.

*Share your image, music, and words with your community on social media; set your post privacy to public and use the following hashtag so others can find it **#fumcsdStory***



You can also share it with the church at fumcsd.org/story-proximity

1| Your Story in Pictures

What main word or words came to mind when you read this week's scripture? Sketch it on the following pages, do a web browser image search, or take a picture of something you encounter today that resonates with you about proximity.

2| Your Story in Music

Is there a song that you associate with closeness? Include the title (or titles) below. Listen to the song throughout the week.

3| Your Story in Entertainment

Is there a book you've read or a TV show or movie that you've watched that reminds you of how proximity has affected your life? Describe how they relate and if you see a direct connection to this week's scripture.

4| Your Story in Words

When is a time that you felt especially close to the Divine? Describe the encounter: What prompted it, where were you, what did you sense or feel, and how did it change you? What can you do to find that proximity again?

5| Your Story in Prayer

Write a **breath prayer** for guided reflection on the Spirit's movement through proximity.

This is a simple prayer that focuses on a short phrase or word while inhaling and exhaling. Some people practice this prayer by breathing in what they need and breathing out what they do not need. Usually, you focus on 1-2 phrases for the prayer and then repeat as needed. It sounds simple but can be very powerful when you meditate on the words.

- Breathe In: *3-4 syllables*
- Breathe Out: *3-4 syllables*

Once you've written your breath prayer, set aside time to repeat it and feel the intentions settle in.

Your Story: Proximity

Your Story: Proximity

Your Story: Proximity

2 | The Story of Advocates

This week's Scripture: Mark 2:1-12 (CEB)

After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!"

Some legal experts were sitting there, muttering among themselves, "Why does he speak this way? He's insulting God. Only the one God can forgive sins."

Jesus immediately recognized what they were discussing, and he said to them, "Why do you fill your minds with these questions? Which is easier—to say to a paralyzed person, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take up your bed, and walk'? But so you will know that the Human One has authority on the earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed, "Get up, take your mat, and go home."

Jesus raised him up, and right away he picked up his mat and walked out in front of everybody. They were all amazed and praised God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this!"

How Advocates Shape Your Spiritual Story

The friends in this story are more than those who know all your secrets or more than being those with whom you laugh and cry. These friends are advocates for the paralyzed man. Advocates do everything possible to make things better for their friends. Advocates will care so much that they will tear a hole through the roof, plead for your case, and ask for what you need, even at the expense of their own safety, reputation, and resources. Having and

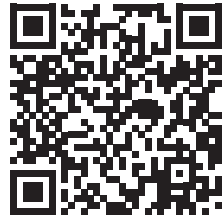
being an advocate creates strong bonds of love and compassion and really can change the world.

Create (and Share!) Your Story

Using the below prompts, reflect on how the Spirit moves through the advocates you encounter – in the past and today – and how the Spirit moves through you when you're an advocate for others.

*Share your image, music, and words with your community on social media; set your post privacy to public and use the following hashtag so others can find it **#fumcsdStory***

You can also share it with the church at fumcsd.org/story-advocates



1| Your Story in Pictures

What image do you associate with the word advocate? Sketch it on the following page, do a web browser image search for advocates in history, or take a picture of something you encounter today that resonates with you about advocacy.

2| Your Story in Music

Is there a song that you associate with the concept of advocate (or friend, defender, champion, supporter)? Include the title (or titles) below. Listen to the song throughout the week.

3| Your Story in Entertainment

Is there a book you've read or a TV show or movie that you've watched that reminds you of how an advocate has affected your life? Describe how they relate and if you see a direct connection to this week's scripture.

4| Your Story in Words

Who is someone who has been an advocate for you? Describe an encounter you had with them and how it impacted your faith

life. Do you recall a time when you advocated for another person? Describe the encounter and how it made you feel.

5| Your Story in Prayer

Write a **T.A.C.O.S. prayer** for guided reflection on the Spirit's movement through advocates. Once your prayer is written, read it out loud.

To write a prayer using the T.A.C.O.S. model, write 1-3 sentences for each category:

- **Thanksgiving:** *Thank you for ...*
- **Adoration:** *God, you are ...*
- **Confirmation:** *I am ...*
- **Others:** *Please ... my [friend/family/coworker/neighbor]*
- **Self:** *Please ... me*

Your Story: Advocates

Your Story: Advocates

Your Story: Advocates

3 | The Story of Cooperation

This week's Scripture: John 6:1-14 (CEB)

After this Jesus went across the Galilee Sea (that is, the Tiberias Sea). A large crowd followed him, because they had seen the miraculous signs he had done among the sick. Jesus went up a mountain and sat there with his disciples. It was nearly time for Passover, the Jewish festival.

Jesus looked up and saw the large crowd coming toward him. He asked Philip, "Where will we buy food to feed these people?" Jesus said this to test him, for he already knew what he was going to do.

Philip replied, "More than a half year's salary worth of food wouldn't be enough for each person to have even a little bit."

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, "A youth here has five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that for a crowd like this?"

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass there. They sat down, about five thousand of them. Then Jesus took the bread. When he had given thanks, he distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, each getting as much as they wanted. When they had plenty to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather up the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves that had been left over by those who had eaten.

When the people saw that he had done a miraculous sign, they said, "This is truly the prophet who is coming into the world."

How Cooperation Shapes Your Spiritual Story

Cooperation is usually something we do when assigned group projects in school. In those cases, we can feel resentful towards those who don't contribute much. In our culture of Western Individualism, cooperation isn't valued much. But cooperation is at the heart of this miracle of feeding the multitude. Jesus had

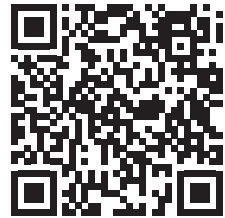
to give the word. The disciples had to organize the crowd. The people had to go along. Most of all, the boy had to have brought his lunch. And likely, once the boy shared, there were others who happened to have brought a meager snack, too. So much so that everyone was fed, with snacks to spare. With everyone contributing, cooperation can solve a lot of problems. All it takes is a leader (or two) to set the example before others follow.

Create (and Share!) Your Story

Using the below prompts, reflect on how the Spirit moves through moments of cooperation: at home, at work, at church, and the other places you move throughout the week.

Share your image, music, and words with your community on social media; set your post privacy to public and use the following hashtag so others can find it #fumcsdStory

You can also share it with the church at fumcsd.org/story-cooperation



1| Your Story in Pictures

What is it that you see, smell, hear, and/or feel when you read this story? Sketch it on the following page, do a web browser image search, or take a picture of something you encounter today that resonates with you about cooperation.

2| Your Story in Music

Is there a song that you associate with the magic moments that can happen through cooperation? Include the title (or titles) below. Listen to the song throughout the week.

3| Your Story in Entertainment

Is there a book you've read or a TV show or movie that you've watched that reminds you of how cooperation has affected your life? Describe how they relate and if you see a direct connection to

this week's scripture.

4| Your Story in Words

When is a time that something seemingly impossible happened thanks to the cooperation of others? Describe what happened and how it made you feel. How about a time that you helped make something seemingly impossible happen for another person? How did it also affect you?

5| Your Story in Prayer

Write a **Haiku** for guided reflection on the Spirit's movement through cooperation.

A haiku is a three-line poem. Each line has a specific set of syllables, but the lines do not have to rhyme.

- Line 1: *5 syllables*
- Line 2: *7 syllables*
- Line 3: *5 syllables*

Once you've written your Haiku, read it out loud – perhaps even two or three times.

Your Story: Cooperation

Your Story: Cooperation

Your Story: Cooperation

4 | The Story of Tranquility

This week's Scripture: Matthew 8:23-27 (CEB)

When Jesus got into a boat, his disciples followed him. A huge storm arose on the lake so that waves were sloshing over the boat. But Jesus was asleep. They came and woke him, saying, "Lord, rescue us! We're going to drown!"

He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you people of weak faith?" Then he got up and gave orders to the winds and the lake, and there was a great calm.

The people were amazed and said, "What kind of person is this? Even the winds and the lake obey him!"

How Tranquility Shapes Your Spiritual Story

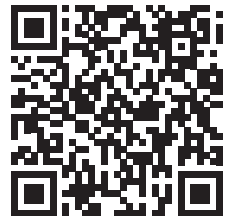
We worry about everything. It's easy to jump to the worst-case scenario and catastrophize situations. What's more difficult is pausing to take a breath, to truly assess the actual threat, and then to make a plan for survival. And what seems nearly impossible is taking a nap while on a rocking boat in a storm. But Jesus did it. How can we get some of that tranquility?

Create (and Share!) Your Story

Using the below prompts, reflect on how the Spirit moves through moments of tranquility: how you experienced it when you were young, how you have experienced it in recent years, and how you may have helped bring it to others.

Share your image, music, and words with your community on social media; set your post privacy to public and use the following hashtag so others can find it **#fumcsdStory**

You can also share it with the church at fumcsd.org/story-tranquility



1| Your Story in Pictures

What color and image do you associate with being anxious or afraid? What color and image do you associate with moments of tranquility? Sketch them on the following page, do a web browser image search, or take a picture of something you encounter today that resonates with you and the theme of tranquility.

2| Your Story in Music

Is there a song that brings you tranquility? Include the title (or titles) below. Listen to the song throughout the week.

3| Your Story in Entertainment

Is there a book you've read or a TV show or movie that you've watched that reminds you of a moment of tranquility in your life? Describe how they relate and if you see a direct connection to this week's scripture.

4| Your Story in Words

When is the last time you remember being in a state of complete tranquility? What were you doing, where were you, and how did it feel? Is there a way that you can replicate that experience in the future?

5| Your Story in Prayer

Write an **A.C.T.S. prayer** for guided reflection on the Spirit's movement through tranquility.

To write a prayer using the A.C.T.S. model, write 1-3 sentences for each category:

- **Adoration:** *God, you have acted by ...*
- **Confession:** *I haven't always ... Please help me choose to ...*
- **Thanksgiving:** *Thank you for ...*
- **Supplication for Community:** *Please ... [communities you are a*

part of]. Please ... [additional communities with needs]

Once your A.C.T.S. prayer is written, pause and read it out loud.

Your Story: Tranquility

Your Story: Tranquility

Your Story: Tranquility

5 | The Story of Love

This week's Scripture: Luke 15:11-32 (CEB)

Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the inheritance.' Then the father divided his estate between them. Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.

"When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, but I'm starving to death! I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands."' So he got up and went to his father.

"While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. Then his son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. The servant replied, 'Your brother has arrived, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he received his son back safe and sound.' Then the older son was furious and didn't want to enter in, but his father came

out and begged him. He answered his father, 'Look, I've served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you've never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.' Then his father said, 'Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.'"

How Love Shapes Your Spiritual Story

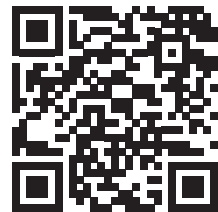
We've all been there more or less: As the child who made poor decisions and now regrets them, with all the shame, humiliation, and embarrassment that goes with it. We've also been the child who feels ignored because of the stupidity of another sibling, with all the resentment, judgement, and self-righteousness that goes with it. And yet, God says, "Welcome home, I love you." And "Everything I have is yours." That's unconditional love. And we don't deserve it, but God gives it to us all anyway.

Create (and Share!) Your Story

Using the below prompts, reflect on how the Spirit moves through moments of love that you've experienced in your life. Love that's been given to you by others and the love that you have given to those around you.

Share your image, music, and words with your community on social media; set your post privacy to public and use the following hashtag so others can find it #fumcsdStory

You can also share it with the church at fumcsd.org/story-love



1| Your Story in Pictures

Who comes to mind when you think of unconditional love, as demonstrated by this week's story? Sketch this person on the following page, do a web browser image search, or take a picture of someone you encounter today that resonates with you about unconditional love.

2| Your Story in Music

Is there a song that you associate with unconditional love? Include the title (or titles) below. Listen to the song throughout the week.

3| Your Story in Entertainment

Is there a book you've read or a TV show or movie that you've watched that reminds you of a moment of love in your life? Describe how they relate and if you see a direct connection to this week's scripture.

4| Your Story in Words

In what ways might you have experienced the Spirit's love during your life? What are ways that you might be able to recognize and experience that love more frequently?

5| Your Story in Prayer

Write a **Guided Meditation** that reflects on the Spirit's movement through love.

To write a guided meditation script, start with words of the scripture or the feelings that it conveys to you. Here is a basic outline you can use:

- **Introduction:** *In a comfortable position, close your eyes and breathe deeply ...*
- **Words of scripture or visualization (capture the five senses):**

- *With these words ...I feel, see, hear, touch, smell ...*
- *With each breath, I imagine ...*
- **Positive Affirmations:**
 - *In these ways, I'm reminded God ...*
 - *In these ways, I'm reminded I ...*
- **Action Steps:**
 - *Allow yourself to imagine the possibilities of what life could look like when you fully embrace these affirmations ...*
- **Closing:** *Open your eyes and move forward in your day with ...*

Once you've written your script, you can record yourself reading the script. Then, close your eyes and settle into a comfortable position to listen to your recorded meditation.

Your Story: Love

Your Story: Love

Your Story: Love

Your Story: Love

6 | The Story of Forgiveness

This week's Scripture: John 8:2-11 (CEB)

Early in the morning he returned to the temple. All the people gathered around him, and he sat down and taught them. The legal experts and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery. Placing her in the center of the group, they said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone women like this. What do you say?" They said this to test him, because they wanted a reason to bring an accusation against him. Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger.

They continued to question him, so he stood up and replied, "Whoever hasn't sinned should throw the first stone." Bending down again, he wrote on the ground. Those who heard him went away, one by one, beginning with the elders. Finally, only Jesus and the woman were left in the middle of the crowd.

Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Is there no one to condemn you?"

She said, "No one, sir."

Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, don't sin anymore."

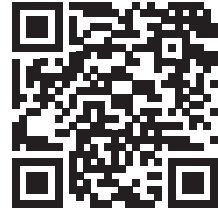
How Forgiveness Shapes Your Spiritual Story

This story is most impactful, not because of the forgiveness given to a woman in the wrong, but because of the forgiveness of the crowd who thought their wrongful acts were unknown. We could focus on the exposure of the woman and the calling out of the crowd. But what is most incredible and more scandalous is the forgiveness given to everyone.

Create (and Share!) Your Story

Using the below prompts, reflect on how the Spirit moves through moments of forgiveness in your life and the life of others around you.

Share your image, music, and words with your community on social media; set your post privacy to public and use the following hashtag so others can find it #fumcsdStory



You can also share it with the church at fumcsd.org/story-forgiveness

1| Your Story in Pictures

What does forgiveness look, sound, and feel like? Sketch it on the following page, do a web browser image search, or take a picture of something you encounter today that resonates with you as it pertains to forgiveness.

2| Your Story in Music

Is there a song that you associate with forgiveness? Include the title (or titles) below. Listen to the song throughout the week.

3| Your Story in Entertainment

Is there a book you've read or a TV show or movie that you've watched that portrays a moment of forgiveness in the storyline? Describe how they relate to your experiences of forgiveness and if you see a direct connection to this week's scripture.

4| Your Story in Words

How has another person's forgiveness influenced your life? Did it impact your faith or spiritual growth? Has there been a time when your act of forgiveness toward another person influenced your faith life?

5| Your Story in Prayer

Write a **Tanka** that reflects on the Spirit's movement through forgiveness.

This extended Haiku is a five-line poem that is a total of 31 syllables. Like a traditional Haiku, the lines of a Tanka do not have to rhyme.

- Line 1: *5 syllables*
- Line 2: *7 syllables*
- Line 3: *5 syllables*
- Line 4: *7 syllables*
- Line 5: *7 syllables*

Once you've written your Tanka, read it out loud.

Your Story: Forgiveness

Your Story: Forgiveness

Your Story: Forgiveness

Continue Your Story

Join us for worship, radical love, and divine justice throughout this season and beyond: fumcsd.org



Sunday Worship
Traditional: 9 AM | Sanctuary & Online
Progressive message in a traditional service

Tapestry: 11 AM | Chapel
Guided reflection through scripture, art, music, and community



Maundy Thursday Communion
Thursday, April 17 | 7:30 PM

Honor the Story of Devotion with communion and reflection

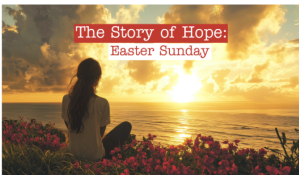
In Person (Sanctuary) & Online



Good Friday Tenebrae
Friday, April 18 | 7:30 PM

Experience the Story of Death through a somber service of Tenebrae (darkness)

In Person (Sanctuary) & Online



Easter Sunday Worship
Sunday, April 20 | 9 & 11 AM

Celebrate the Story of Hope with a progressive message & moving music

In Person (Sanctuary) & Online



Perspectives Pastors Podcast
New Episodes Sundays

Gain new ideas about our ancient Biblical text and what it means for modern life

Podcast Platforms | fumcsd.org/podcast