



Cedar Center for
Discipleship
and Renewal
at Forward Movement

Sharing Our Stories

Discussion and Reflection Guide

The videos, podcast/audio version, and pdf transcripts can all be found on the Cedar website at discipleship.forwardmovement.org/resources

You are invited to pause the third episode at certain points for in person or written reflection, the time stamps are noted within Episode 3 notes.

[Episode one, “The Scripts We’re Given”](#): The religious scripts we are handed in America are often not sufficient. Andrew invites us into the practice of discovery and bearing witness to our own stories and the Gospel story.

[Episode two, “Friendship with God”](#) deepens the engagement with Jesus’ stories of friendship, with special care to plumb those stories and ours – including the messy ones, with responsibility and love. “Friendship is not a doctrine you have to defend.”

[Episode three, “You are the Letters of God,”](#) led by Kristin, looks where Jesus is most active in scripture, and in our own lives – and not in a triumphalist way. Looking at the letters of our own lives, the real scripts, Kristin leads an exercise to help you better know your own story and to share it anew.

If you have feedback for future courses, please don’t hesitate to be in touch with the Cedar team, whose information can be found at discipleship.forwardmovement.org.

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Episode 1: The Scripts We're Given

Summary: The religious scripts we are handed in America are often not sufficient. Andrew invites us into the practice of discovery and bearing witness to our own stories and the Gospel story.

The Gospel and Your Story:

The Gospel isn't a script pasted over your story, it's the claim that you are known, not just observed or tolerated by a God who isn't trying to recruit you or grade you. It's the claim that the long handwriting of your life isn't random. It's the claim that the people who carried something to you were carrying something they didn't fully understand, and that's okay, because the thing they were carrying is older and bigger than all of us. And if that's true, and I think it is, then telling your story isn't selling something or persuading someone. It's bearing witness. You are a letter. You're worth reading. The good news is the writer is a great author, and your story is a classic.

-Fr Andrew Stravitz, Episode 1

Discussion Questions

- What “scripts” have you been handed in your life? Do these scripts come with roles that you have been expected to play? What has your response been to these scripts?
- The Spirit of God has been writing on you through the people who loved you, through the love you have given, the questions you couldn't answer, and through the moments of grace you've experienced. As you reflect on this scripture, what particular moments in your life come to mind?

II Corinthians 3:3: You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

- An evangelist is one who announces the good news. Who first told you the Good News? Have you received other good news throughout your life? How did that feel?

Episode II: Friendship with God

Summary: We are invited to grow beyond the scripts offered to us, and to share the slow strange truth of our lives with God, our friend, and others. Friend of God was a title. Speaking to God face to face, like Moses, was the highest form of relationship with the divine. Read John 15:15 with this context:

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

Friendship does these things: Confronts, Comforts. Calls.

Look for ways in each of these passages that the friendship of Jesus Confronts, Comforts, and Calls. For reference, the scripture passages mentioned in this video are:

- **Political enemies:** Matthew 10:2-4: Matthew and Simon are called
- **Outcasts:** Mark 4:35-5:20: The Gerasene Demoniac and John 4: The Samaritan Woman
- **Betrayers:** Luke 22: Judas betrays, Peter denies

We are living in a moment when every group in America, especially in American Christianity, is being told to choose a side, fly a flag, sign a statement. And here, Jesus is doing this stunning thing. He's forming a community where the first loyalty is to a friendship that crosses the most coercive politics. He doesn't make them apolitical. Matthew and Simon were both deeply political people. He just refuses to let those politics be their deepest loyalty.

-Fr. Andrew Stravitz, Episode II

Discussion Questions

- When in your life has a friend confronted you?
- When in your life has a friend comforted you?
- When in your life has a friend called you or invited you into something new?
- Name one time in your life when you felt God confronting, comforting, or calling you.
- Which of the Bible stories resonated most deeply for you, and why?

Episode III: You are the letters of God

Summary: American Christianity's conversion and liturgical scripts don't completely fit our real stories.

Our lives are letters, that are best read looking backwards and with good company.

Three story shapes:

- **Conversion script:** Revolution is the shape
- **Liturgical script:** Evolution is the shape

Neither script can fully encompass the shape of Devolution, but this is where Jesus is most active in scripture and in our lives.

Only a friend crosses the sea into the part of the story you're most ashamed of. Don't read past your devolution.

The task is Reimagination. Reimagination is recovery. It recovers what actually happened. What you actually felt and weren't allowed to say. Reimagining is what lets you tell the true version, the one with the dissonance still in it, the doubt still in it, the harm still in it. Because the friendship of God is secure enough to let you be honest about all of it without the story falling apart.

-Fr. Andrew Stravitz and Kristin Tovar, Episode III

Discussion Questions

- Friendship gets past arrogance, it **confronts** certainty, or smugness. When were you sure, and loved proved you wrong in a way that set you free? When did someone love you enough to tell you a hard truth, and you knew somehow that the confrontation was love? (pause at minute 13:29)
- **Comfort** in Fear and Hurt. When were you comforted in a way you still can't fully account for? Something came near. It didn't necessarily fix anything. It just came near and held, and validated, and soothed. The graveyard chapters – when did someone come and get you? (pause at minute 13:42)
- **Calling** to go and do the same. Looking back, who carried something to you that you didn't have words for at the time? Whose letter of good news are you becoming? Who are you now being called to confront in love, to comfort, to carry? (pause at minute 13:59)
- Where is the handwriting the clearest in your story?

Author and Content Development team:



Fr. Andrew Stravitz is an Episcopal priest and licensed marriage and family therapist in Phoenix. He has planted churches in Chicago and Phoenix, and now runs a family and couples clinic in central Phoenix.

Andrew's theological work focuses on reconciliation, pastoral psychology, and the intersection of affect theory with Trinitarian theology. He is particularly interested in the intersection of theology and psychology, especially the themes of incarnation, suffering, and theories of emotional resilience.

When not in the counseling room or pulpit, Andrew is likely making sourdough, chauffeuring children, or pretending he's not a washed-up athlete.



Kristin Tovar is an artist, entrepreneur, writer, and community builder in Tucson, Arizona. She has spent more than twenty years helping people, churches, non-profits, and businesses embody and live their values. Kristin invites others to notice what is often overlooked and celebrate the gifts already present around them. Her work is focused on creating spaces where people feel seen, connected, and inspired to live with greater intention and integration of faith in all spheres of life. In times of rest or play, she's an avid concert-goer, bird enthusiast, and deeply enjoys spending time with her loved ones.