

Faith Shaping Prompts: **Here's my story**

Growth

Find it: A “nurse log” - a fallen, decomposing tree with new plants growing out of it.

Notice: The “nurse log” offers nutrients and protection that allows other plants to grow out of it. Humans who are growing have “nurse logs” to help them along too.

Talk about: “Describe a person who brings out the best in you. What are they like?”

Go deeper: Are you a “nurse log” for anyone? What are some things you have to offer that can help others along?

Stuck

Find it: A tree that has a chain on it.

Notice: Over time, the growth pattern of the tree will be affected by being chained up. Difficult feelings can sometimes make us feel stuck and chained up - like this tree.

Talk about: Choose one of these difficult emotions and talk about how that causes you or others to be stuck and chained up in life: anxiety, discouragement, fear, unforgiveness, disappointment, anger.

Go deeper: If you could ask Jesus one question about this difficult emotion - either for yourself or on behalf of someone you know - what question would you ask him? How do you think he feels toward you or the person you are thinking of when you are feeling those difficult emotions.

Expectations

Find it: Read the story of Si the Squirrel together.

Notice: Si saying “yes” to everyone’s expectations was helpful for them but harmful for him!

Talk about: Who in your world is expecting you to be or do what they want? How do the expectations of others affect you - what kind of weight do they have in your life?

Go deeper: What are some expectations you feel God has for you? How does that feel? How does that impact you?

Loss

Find it: Something on the ground around you that has fallen off a tree. Pick it up and try to reattach it to the tree. Impossible? Yup! - just like it’s impossible to go backwards and fix a loss from your life.

Notice: Loss is something everyone encounters in life - loss of a friendship, family break-up, being left out of a group, having dreams not work out. Our job is to recognize and accept the sadness that loss brings without trying to fix it or hide from it. Walking through loss is hard - but the story never ends there.

Talk about: Tell the story about a loss in your life. How has it impacted you?

Go deeper: What advice would you have for a friend who is experiencing loss?

Worry

Find it: The huge tree that has splintered and fallen over.

Notice: The tree's trunk is still rooted to the ground but something happened - maybe a big wind - and it pushed this tree to the point of cracking.

Talk about: "One thing that happens when I start to feel worried is ... Instead, I wish I could ..."

Go deeper: What part of God's character - who he says he is - could you lean on when the winds of worry come? What stops you from finding support in Him?

Value

Find it: A tree that was hit by lightning.

Notice: Trees are valuable to loggers because of what can be made from the wood. This tree was hit by lightning at its core and to those loggers it now has no value. But to the forest around it, the burnt out tree is incredibly valuable because the ash that comes from the brokenness feeds the plants around it. It all depends on perspective.

Talk about: Tell the story of a time when a situation or a person caused you to feel less than valuable. What do you think makes you valuable?

Go deeper: God sees value differently than us. What things have you heard about how God sees you? Does what he thinks impact what you think about yourself?

Obstacles

Find it: A tree that has swallowed a big boulder

Notice: This tree, just like all the others in the forest, didn't have a choice about where it grew. But the place its seed was planted had a huge obstacle in the way - the boulder. Because the tree's roots grew strong and deep and its water supply was fresh and constant, it flourished despite the obstacle. It ended up looking different from the other trees, but it is still healthy and strong.

Talk about: What is something difficult that you have had to grow around in life (eg. upbringing, health challenge, personality, other people, being different ...). How has that shaped you into who you are today?

Go deeper: Who are the people in your life that have given you strength, courage or support to grow around obstacles? What do you think God thinks about your obstacles? Why do you think that?

Rest

Find it: A high point to rest and look around. Grab a seat.

Notice: Stop and become aware of what is around you. Complete this list out loud together:

- 5 things I see
- 4 things I can touch/feel
- 3 things I can hear
- 2 things I smell
- 1 thing I know

Talk about: Describe a place you feel safe - a place you feel like you can totally put down your guard and relax. It could be somewhere you've been or somewhere in your imagination.

Go deeper: Close your eyes and in the silence, imagine yourself in that safe place. Then imagine Jesus joining you there. Turn to Him in your imagination and ask Him if there's something He wants to show you or tell you. Sit quietly and wait to see what He says.

After a few minutes being quiet together, share what meeting Jesus in your restful place was like for you. Were you able to imagine that He had good things to say to you and about you? What thoughts or impressions came to your mind while you sat together with Jesus?