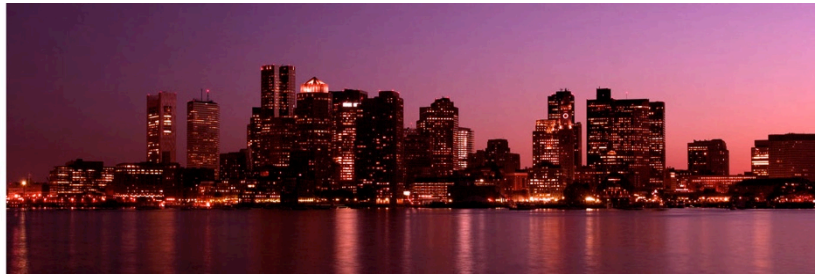


November 1, 2019

Brian & Malisa Ellis – Serving with Cru in Boston

Change Boston



Dear friends,

I've got a super long letter this month, but I think each of the stories are worth you hearing them and I hope you'll be encouraged.

Matthew's Party

This fall, I've been studying how Jesus calls his first disciples. In Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:14-22, and Luke 5:27-38, Jesus calls Matthew. "Jesus said to him 'Follow Me.' And leaving everything, he rose and followed him." Immediately Matthew walks into his house and he invites all of his friends and throws a party for Jesus.

Don't you love the idea that, as a disciple of Christ, he's throwing parties so that Christ can be present with all his friends who don't know him?

When it came to plan our monthly Citywide gathering for Cru last month, I wanted to focus on this idea of "entering into the story." And so rather than a band and a speaker, students walked into a scene that was like walking into the kind of party Matthew threw. We made it kind of like an art gallery opening – we had students that were artists display or perform their art. We had photography, hand-lettering, acrylic paintings, and drawings. We had live music. We had big tables set with appetizers. We had spoken word – my friend Rose performed the story of Matthew meeting Jesus and throwing a party – the very thing we were re-enacting this night.

Hearing People's Stories

And as our students sat down at the table, we shared the purpose of the night. "We want you to hear people's stories and then learn how to craft your own story."

Imagine being at Matthew's party. Jesus is there telling stories. Parables. Stories about the disciples being transformed. Gospel stories. I asked two of the students I work with if they would share their stories. Albany and Grace agreed.

Here're the short versions:

Albany's Story



Albany (right) is a Junior at Emerson College on the Volleyball team. We meet up every Sunday night with a group of athletes from across Boston. It's one of the highlights of my week.

Albany grew up a missionary kid, played varsity volleyball, and excelled academically. When she got to Emerson College (alma mater to tons of TV and movie actors, directors, producers, etc. who form our culture), she got sucked up into a scene she'd never seen before: a scene of partying and dating and one that she really didn't want. It was consuming her. By the mid-point of her freshman year, Albany was full of shame. It took hold of her heart.

She had some powerful experiences

with the Lord where she realized that the Lord was coming to her with **great love** and **great forgiveness** and **great acceptance**. Her feelings of shame disappeared when she realized the Jesus took all of her shame, put it to death on the cross, and wiped it away. She didn't need to live in the shadow of shame anymore. She was free. Albany experienced forgiveness for the way she had been living and acceptance.

Grace's Story

Grace, a senior at Simmons College, shared about the **great tenderness** of the Lord. And tenderness is really what Grace needed this last year. Grace got involved with Cru at Simmons her freshman year and grew a ton in that community over her first couple years of college. But last year, she dropped out of school for a year because of debilitating anxiety, depression, and panic attacks.

Mental health struggles run in Grace's family (including a schizophrenic grandmother and hoarding disordered father). But the issues are shameful and so her family brushes them under the rug or ignores them or makes fun of them. In addition to the shame of struggling with mental health issues, Grace was also afraid of the shame she'd bring on her family for dropping out of school for a year. Grace is from an immigrant family from New York City who highly values education, and so she felt a double pang of shame.



Here's a selfie of me and Grace. She did such a great job sharing so vulnerably about how God is at work in her life

Going home to New York to live with her family and get the space and professional help she needed to work through these mental health issues didn't feel like a good option, but it was the only option.

And yet... in the midst of all of that, she experienced the tenderness of the Lord. She experienced his care. And Grace was able to face the problems head on, engage with them, and get the help she needed. Through all of that, she knew that the Lord was present. Though the mental health stuff isn't perfect, and though she will always probably wrestle in that area of her life, there's a security and a stability and that she can be confident that the Lord walked through it with her.

Shame on Campus

Shame is a huge thing we're talking about on campus lately. I thought it was going to just be an opening question at a Bible study I led a couple weeks ago, but it took up the whole two hours of our study. There's a huge increase in anxiety, panic disorders, and depression on

campus. I think the statistic is something like 3 out of 4 college-age women will struggle with anxiety or depression.

What was so great about these women telling their stories is that they were real; they were vulnerable; they were raw; and people could identify with them.

Crafting your own story

Albany and Grace shared their stories and then, using those stories as models, we went on to train over a hundred students from across the city how to share their own story. They saw the example of authentic real stories in Albany and Grace.

I'm super excited we are unleashing a hundred students to go and be able to have gospel conversations with their friends.

What about you? Have you ever considered thinking through and sitting down and writing your story out in a way that is winsome, tangible, and authentic? There's something powerful about spending some time thinking through and writing down your own story.

Then when you're in conversations at the pickup line up at school, or at work, or out to lunch with friends, or talking to a neighbor as you guys are gathering leaves, or on an airplane, when you get into those conversations with people, your story is wrapped around the gospel in a way that you can make just cut it roll off your tongue and it's not this really hard thing to share.

So that's my challenge to you this week - write down how God has been meeting you in shameful places and restoring you to life and community and relationship and peace. And then share your story with someone - including me. I'd love to hear it.

Loving our adventurous Lord,

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