

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: “The people and places that have helped me grow are ... ; Because of them, I can...”

OR Describe a person (real or imagined) 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? Where did you get those things?

Stuck

Find it: A chained up tree.

Notice: The growth pattern of the tree will be affected by being chained up.

Talk about: “When I think of my life, one thought or feeling that can “chain me up” is ...”

OR What do you do when you are feeling stuck in a thought or emotion or way of behaving that isn't bringing life to you or your world? How does that feel?

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

Expectations

Find it: The story of Si the Squirrel.

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

Talk about: “Others expectations often make me feel ...”

OR What kind of weight do the expectations of others have in your life? How do you know others are holding those expectations of you?

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, disappointment. Our job is to recognize and accept the deep sadness of loss, and know it’s ok that we are powerless to reverse the loss because the story doesn’t end there.

Talk about: “In my life, I have felt powerless to not worry about losing ...”

OR 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 - that pushed this tree to the point of cracking.

Talk about: "The kind of worries that threaten to "crack" me are ..."

OR "One thing that happens when I worry is ... Instead, I wish I could ..."

Go deeper: What part God's nature - who he says he is - could you lean on to support you when the winds of worry come? What stops you from doing that?

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 some people would say that 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: "When I don't feel like I have much value I will often ...; I wish I could ..."

OR Tell the story of a time when you felt like something or someone destroyed your sense of value. How has that shaped your perspective about what makes you valuable?

Go deeper: In God's perspective, your value is not based on your "usefulness". So what is it that makes us so valuable to Him? What things have you heard about how God sees you?

Obstacles

Find it: A tree that has swallowed a big boulder (*hint: other side of the creek).

Notice: This tree, just like all the others in the forest, didn't have a choice about where it grew. The place its seed was planted had a huge obstacle in the way - the boulder. But 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: "An obstacle that I have had to grow around in life is ...;
It has made me ..."

OR What is something in your upbringing or personality that made you feel different than others as you were growing up? How did that affect who you are today?

Go deeper: What or who represents the good places 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 out over the valley. 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. Did any emotions stir inside you? Were you able to imagine that Jesus had good things to say to you and about you? What did He say?