

Hawai‘i Conference United Church of Christ

2026 Lenten Study

EXPLORING OUR FAMILY STORIES



Explore family stories through Scripture, history, and faith.
Discover how God's grace weaves through generations
and how our past shapes our present and future.

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This study is brought to you by
Our Church's Wider Mission funds and
The Hawai‘i Conference United Church of Christ
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The Biblical citations in this guide are from:
The Inclusive Bible, Priest for Equality, the Quixote Center, 1999.

INTRODUCTION

Why focus on families during Lent? Because God's reconciling work often begins at home. In the early church, households became the foundation of faith communities. Long before the Apostles were sharing the good news, the prophet Malachi envisioned a Spirit-led restoration of family relationships torn apart by the trauma of exile (Mal. 4:5b). Today, we invite you to rediscover your family stories as sacred ground where God's grace weaves through generations. This discovery is about honesty, creativity, and prayerful reflection to open space for forgiveness, healing, and renewal during this holy season.

This study is designed to help you explore family stories and storytelling:

1. How Do We Tell Our Stories

Explore how interpretation shapes memory and identity.

2. Unpacking Complicated Stories

Engage the complexity of family narratives.

3. Glorious and Inglorious Storytelling

Reflect on both triumphs and failures in what family stories emphasize and deemphasize.

4. The Big History and Our Stories

Connect personal stories to broader historical contexts.

5. What Informs Our Storytelling

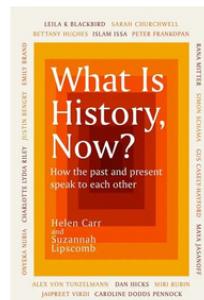
Consider how geography, culture, and imagination shape what we tell.

6. Recovering Lost Voices

Honor those whose stories have been silenced or forgotten.

RESOURCES

Each session is rooted in Scripture and enriched by insights from *What is History Now? How the Past and Present Speak to Each Other*, by Helen Carr and Suzannah Lipscomb (2021).



FORMAT

Every session follows a consistent rhythm:



A welcome and prayer offered by the facilitator.



An introduction to the theme engaging the spiritual wisdom of Malachi and guidance from *What is History Now?* to provide perspective and tools for reviewing family history.



A Story Circle activity to share and listen along with **Discussion Questions** for deeper engagement.



A video reflection from Conference Minister David Popham connecting the themes and topics to the faith story of the Hawai'i Conference.



A Lenten Practice constructed around the call of Malachi for us to “pay attention” to the stories we tell.



A Closing Prayer to honor God’s presence with our families, and

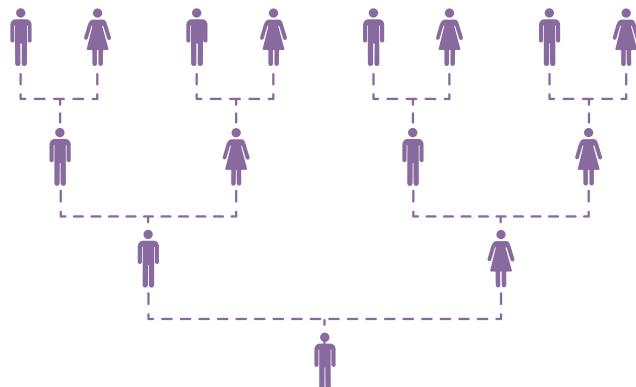


Optional At-Home Activities for those who wish to undertake more exploration of family narratives.

Each session invites honesty, creativity, and grace as we seek God’s presence in the stories that shape us. Bring photos or artifacts when possible as they help make the conversation tangible and meaningful.

Note to participants:

You may wish to create a simple timeline or family tree template to help visualize and map your family narratives.



TIPS FOR STUDY LEADERS

Leading these sessions is about creating a safe, grace-filled space for honest storytelling.

Here are four key areas to focus on:



1. Time Management

- Allocate 60–75 minutes per session:
 - **Welcome and Opening Prayer:** 3 minutes
 - **Guide & Introduction:** 10 minutes
 - **Story Circle Activity with Discussion Questions:** 40 minutes
 - **Video Reflection & Prayer:** 7 minutes
- Build in flexibility for deeper sharing—sometimes the Spirit leads beyond the clock.



2. Empathetic Presence

- Listen actively without judgment; affirm each person's courage to share.
- Use phrases like "Thank you for sharing that" or "That sounds meaningful" to validate contributions.
- Be mindful of emotional weight and pause for prayer or silence when needed.



3. Facilitating Skills

- Set clear expectations: confidentiality, respect, and grace.
- Encourage participation without pressure: invite, don't compel.
- Manage dynamics: gently redirect if one voice dominates while drawing out quieter participants.
- Encourage the use of artifacts (photos, objects) to make stories tangible and spark conversation.



4. Leader's Posture

- Approach each session as a companion, not an expert.
- Your role is to guide reflection, not to resolve every complexity.
- Trust the process and God's presence in the conversation.



Session 1

How Do We Tell Our Stories

Explore how interpretation shapes memory and identity.



Welcome and Opening Prayer: Facilitator



Guides

- **Malachi 2:17c – 3:1a**
 - “Where is the God of justice? Well, pay attention.”
- **Helen Carr and Suzannah Lipscomb** - Forward and Prologue to *What is History Now?*

A Word from Our Guides:

Our family stories aren't just about the past for they shape who we are today. For example, Malachi is in essence saying to those in Judah, you ask, “where is the God of justice?” I'm telling you “pay attention.” The prophet understands which stories we tell most often and which ones we avoid shape our perceptions. Session guides Helen Carr and Suzannah Lipscomb suggest that history is interpretive as our experiences color the narratives we relate. We are encouraged to question how we look at the past, how we think about the present, and how we plan to act in the future due to the impact of our family stories.



Story Circle Activity

**Share about
a revered
ancestor.**

Bring a photo or
artifact if possible.

Discussion Questions

1. How does your personal experience shape this story today?
2. What in this story are you paying attention to?
3. What in this story needs your attention?
4. Where do you see God's hand in this story?

**Video Reflection**Find online at: bit.ly/hcucc2026study

Kahu Popham reflects on the use of Hawaiian language in the Hawaiian Evangelical Association versus its use in the wider Territory of Hawai'i context as an example of how personal experience shapes our storytelling.

**Lenten Practice**

**HOW CAN YOU TAKE UP
"PAYING ATTENTION"
AS A PRACTICE DURING
LENT?**

**Prayer**

God of memory, we give thanks for the stories that have shaped our lives and communities. Teach us to honor these stories with grace and truth, even when they reveal difficulty or pain. Help us listen deeply, speak kindly, and share with humility. May our remembering lead to healing and hope, and may we find Your presence in every chapter of our family's story.

**Optional
At-Home**

- Create a family story map showing where ancestors lived and how geography and culture influenced traditions in the telling of their stories.



- Interview a family member about a favorite story and compare interpretations.



Session 2

Unpacking Complicated Stories

Engage the complexity of family narratives.



Welcome and Opening Prayer: Facilitator



Guides

- **Malachi 1:4a:**

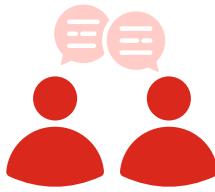
- “*When Edom says, ‘We are beaten down, but let us rebuild our ruined homes,’ YHWH of hosts replies, ‘If you build them, I will tear them down.’*”

- **Charlotte Lydia Riley** - Chapter 17: *Why History Should Always Be Rewritten*

Introduction

Family stories are filled with complexity. For example, the mention of Edom in the Malachi passage takes us on a long and convoluted history that started with the two brothers Esau and Jacob and stolen blessings to national entities at intermittent war and now jealousies during the time of Malachi. Even in the New Testament we bump up against the Edomite, King Herod, who is also King of Judah at the time of the birth of Jesus. In reviewing our family stories, we, too, run up against complicated stories with their own long and convoluted histories.

Session guide Charlotte Lydia Riley notes that at times someone might select “what others believe to be the wrong stories, highlighting the wrong moments,” affirming that complexity is a part of every family’s story. Yet, unpacking these stories can grant us a deeper understanding of our family experiences.



Story Circle Activity

**Recall a
family story
that has
always been
convoluted
for you.**

Discussion Questions

1. What are the complexities of this story?
2. How does your family navigate these complexities?
3. Where do you see God's grace in these complexities?

**Video Reflection**Find online at: bit.ly/hcucc2026study

Kahu Popham uses the story of the Mission Memorial building to unpack the complicated strain in the aspirations of the Hawaiian Evangelical Board to be both a revered institution by society and a relevant organization among the youth.

**Lenten Practice**

PAY ATTENTION TO THE FEELINGS THAT ARISE AS YOU REVIEW CONVOLUTED FAMILY HISTORY.

**Prayer**

God, You know the hidden places of our hearts and the untold chapters of our families. Hold these stories in Your grace and teach us wisdom as we face what is complicated and incomplete. Give us courage to name what is hard, compassion to understand what is broken, and faith to trust that Your love can redeem every story. Guide us toward reconciliation and peace.

**Optional At-Home**

- Write a lament or prayer for unresolved stories.



- Research historical context for the time period of the story to better understand its complexities.



Session 3

Glorious and Inglorious Storytelling

Reflect on both triumphs and failures in what family stories emphasize and deemphasize.



Welcome and Opening Prayer: Facilitator



Guides

- **Malachi 1:2-3a:**

- “I have loved you, says YHWH. ‘But you ask, How have you shown your love?’ Esau and Jacob were brothers, weren’t they? replies YHWH. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob, but hated Esau.’”

- **Emily Brand**

- Chapter 13: *Why Family History Matters*

Introduction

In the long and convoluted story of Edom which we reviewed last week, we now glimpse a bit of inglorious storytelling. Essentially God is telling Israel, “you know I love you because I hated Edom.” This is a hard text to encounter because in the passage we encounter the favoritism and rejection experienced by Jacob and Esau. Session guide Emily Brand reminds us that the desire to feel connected to our ancestors is deeply human. Yet, while our family stories shed light on who we are they also reveal both glorious and inglorious moments. Facing these truths helps us understand ourselves and our families more fully.



Story Circle Activity

Share a story that is unpopular in your family.

Bring an object or photo if possible.

Discussion Questions

1. Would you classify this story as glorious or inglorious?
2. Who was praised for representing the family norm? Who was criticized for letting the family down?
3. Where do you see God's grace in both the glory and the struggle?

**Video Reflection**Find online at: bit.ly/hcucc2026study

Kahu Popham reflects on the tension of the Hawaii Evangelical Association Board as inheritors of a glorious and inglorious legacy situated between an honored missionary movement and betrayal of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

**Lenten Practice**

PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU GO ABOUT LOVING AND HATING THIS WEEK.

**Prayer**

God of families, we give you thanks for the glorious memories we share freely and the ways these memories create a sense of belonging and bind our families throughout generations.

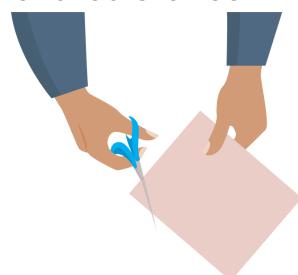
Comfort us when our family histories and memories lead to pain, grief, embarrassment, and shame. Remind us of the importance of our family stories as we confront painful narratives and seek to bring about change in the present, while we cherish precious memories and family traditions in our hearts.

**Optional At-Home**

- Make a two-column reflection: “**Glorious Moments**” vs. “**Inglorious Moments**” in family history and pray over both.



- Create a collage of a glorious and inglorious moment from your family’s shared stories.



Session 4

The Big History and Our Stories

Connect personal stories to broader historical contexts.



Welcome and Opening Prayer: Facilitator



Guides

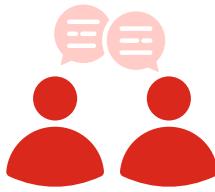
- **Malachi 2:10a:**

- “Are we all not the daughters and sons of God? Did not one God create us?”

- **Rana Mitter** - Chapter 16: *How East Asia's Past is Shaping the Present and Future (Or Why We Ignore China and Japan at Our Peril)*

Introduction

The passage of *Malachi* not only underscores Israel's unity in God, this passage suggests each of us is also a part of God's story unfolding in the world, connected to the storytelling God has been involved in from the beginning of time. Session guide, *Rana Mitter*, reminds us that big history, though, often reflects the voices of those in power, leaving out important perspectives. Our family stories can help fill those gaps and connect personal experiences to larger historical narratives, and even to God's divine story.



Story Circle Activity

**Reflect on how
your family
experience fits
into the broader
history of your
community or
culture.**

Discussion Questions

1. What is the context of your family?
2. What historical sagas do older family stories speak from?
3. Where does faith intersect with these larger narratives?

**Video Reflection**Find online at: bit.ly/hcucc2026study

Kahu Popham reflects on the Hawaiian Evangelical Board's awareness and reactions to World War I and how their faith both grasped and failed to grasp the implications of this global historical event.

**Lenten Practice**

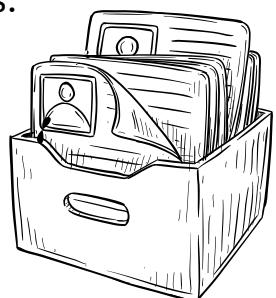
PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR COMPREHENSION OF A BELOVED FAMILY STORY WHEN YOU GAIN A DEEPER INSIGHT INTO THE TIME AND PLACE IT OCCURRED IN.

**Prayer**

God of history, You have been our dwelling place across generations. Help us see the bigger picture and honor every voice in our family story. When history feels overwhelming or incomplete, remind us that Your love spans all times and places. Teach us to weave our personal stories into the fabric of Your redeeming work, so that we may live with gratitude, humility, and hope.

**Optional At-Home**

- Explore local history archives or online resources to see how your family's story intersects with community or global events.



- Write a paragraph connecting one family event to a major historical moment.



Session 5

What Informs Our Storytelling

Consider how geography, culture, and imagination shape what we tell.



Welcome and Opening Prayer: Facilitator



Guides

- **Malachi 1:5**

- “Your own eyes *will* see it, and you yourselves *will* say, ‘YHWH’s greatness reaches beyond the confines of Israel.’”

- **Sarah Churchwell - Chapter 4: What is Vernacular History**

Introduction

The prophet Malachi encourages his own people to speak out loud what they see of God’s greatness. They do not need to wait for an official religious investigation into their experience of divine wonder and awe, they simply need to speak about the experience through whatever means they have available. Session guide Sarah Churchwell notes that history is shaped not only by facts but by language, memory, and culture. As a result, family stories mix truth and imagination, influenced by media, rituals, and traditions.



Story Circle Activity

Imagine the opening scene of a movie about your family. Describe the setting, mood, and first line of dialogue.

Discussion Questions

1. Is the opening scene light or dark?
Serene or tense?
2. Who speaks first, and what do they say?
3. What historical facts might give way to family fiction?
4. How does faith shape the way your family tells its story?

**Video Reflection**Find online at: bit.ly/hcucc2026study

Kahu Popham shares how the aspirations of one generation informed the narratives of another generation as reflected in the opening stories of Nu'uanau Congregational Church and the Mid Pacific Institute.

**Lenten Practice**

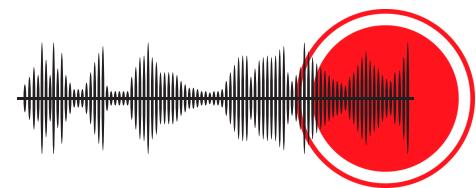
PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOUR FAMILY STORIES BLEND HISTORY AS IT WAS AND HISTORY AS WE WISH IT WERE. HOW MIGHT WE TELL OUR STORIES WITH INTEGRITY?

**Prayer**

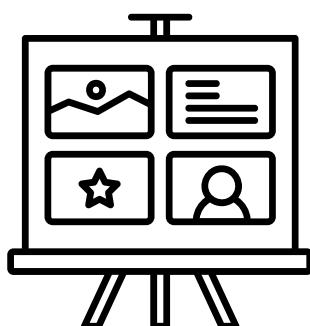
Divine Storyteller, You speak through words and silences, through truth and imagination. Help us discern between surface stories and deeper truths. Give us grace to tell our stories with honesty and tenderness, resisting the urge to hide or distort. May our storytelling honor You and reflect Your light, shaping us into people of integrity and love.

**Optional At-Home**

- Record a family storytelling session and analyze language, tone, and cultural references.



- Create a storyboard for the “opening scene” exercise and share with family.



Session 6

Recovering Lost Voices

Honor those whose stories
have been silenced or forgotten.



Welcome and Opening Prayer: Facilitator



Guides

- **Malachi 4:5-6**

- “*Know this: I will send you the prophet Elijah... and he will reconcile parents to children and children to parents.*”

- **Suzannah Lipscomb** - Chapter 11: *How Can We Recover the Lost Lives of Women?*

Introduction

Some voices in our family history have been silenced or forgotten.

Malachi recognizes that families can become estranged and recovering lost family voices is an act of love and healing. Session guide Suzannah Lipscomb reminds us that while we cannot fully reconstruct the lives of those dismissed by the family, we can honor them by resisting erasure and telling their stories with care.



Story Circle Activity

Approaching sensitive family topics with care, **identify stories that have been ignored and consider why they are ignored.**

Discussion Questions

1. Who are the storytellers in your family? What words and phrases color their telling?
2. Which stories are told often? Which are rarely mentioned?
3. What do these patterns reveal about family norms?
4. How can faith guide us in reclaiming lost voices?

**Video Reflection**Find online at: bit.ly/hcucc2026study

Kahu Popham surprises us with which voices are found in the minutes of the Hawaiian Evangelical Association Board, and which voice is conspicuously absent for a Congregational body and in need of recovering through other sources.

**Lenten Practice**

**PAY ATTENTION TO HOW FAMILY HISTORY IS A LIVING CONVERSATION THAT IS SHAPED BY MEMORY, INTERPRETATION, HONOR, AND SHAME.
HOW MIGHT LOVE BE APPLIED TO THE FAMILY STORYTELLING TRADITIONS?**

**Prayer**

God of memory, sometimes we forget. We forget those who represented the strange or different in our family. We forget that our families tell certain stories while ignoring other stories. We forget our storytelling is limited. Bless us with the humanity to tell all the stories and to seek out stories that have been forgotten, so that our families might be whole.

**Optional At-Home**

- Compile a list of forgotten names from family records and offer prayers of remembrance.



- Write a blessing for those whose stories were silenced.



THE JOURNEY OF OUR STORIES – WHAT'S NEXT?

As we come to the close of this Lenten study, we pause to reflect on the journey we have taken together. Over these weeks, we have explored the sacred ground of family stories and narratives that shape our identity, connect us to history, and reveal God's presence across generations.

We began by asking **how we tell our stories**, recognizing that interpretation colors memory and identity. From there, we ventured into **complicated stories**, acknowledging the tangled threads that weave through family histories. We faced both **glorious and inglorious moments**, learning that honesty about triumphs and failures opens space for grace. We widened our lens to see **the big history and our stories**, discovering how personal narratives intersect with larger historical movements and God's unfolding story. We considered **what informs our storytelling**, noting how culture, geography, and imagination influence the way we remember and share. Finally, we committed to **recovering lost voices**, honoring those silenced or forgotten, and embracing the call to reconciliation and wholeness.

Throughout this journey, scripture and the wisdom of historians have reminded us that storytelling is not merely about the past; rather it is about shaping the present and envisioning the future. Malachi's prophetic call to "pay attention" has guided us to listen deeply, speak truthfully, and tell our stories with integrity and love.

As you move forward, may these practices continue beyond Lent. Keep creating spaces for honest conversation, for laughter and lament, for remembering and imagining. Let your family stories become instruments of healing and hope, weaving together the threads of grace that bind us as God's people.

CLOSING BLESSING

God of all generations, thank You for the stories that have shaped us and the voices that have guided us. Teach us to tell our stories with courage and compassion, to listen with humility, and to live with gratitude for the grace that holds every chapter. May our storytelling bear witness to Your love and lead us toward reconciliation and peace. Amen.