



STORY TELLING FOR ADULTS

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INTRO

It isn't just children who like to escape into Narnia or Never-land. A good story can capture the attention of almost anyone and storytelling is a great way to bring a diverse group of people together to share their experiences and learn from each other as well as have lots of fun.

IDEAL TARGET GROUP:

All Ages (If children are present make sure stories are vetted for suitability)

IDEAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE:

20 – 40

AVERAGE COST FOR THE EVENT:

£150 - £200

THE AIMS:

- to share positive messages with your community through story telling.
- For Christians to invite new people who live or work locally but who probably don't have any contact with the church to a high quality event.
- To enable people from the local community to experience Christian community and have their perceptions of the Christian faith challenged.

WHO?

Storytelling is appropriate for everyone. Traditionally the domain of children you could of course run such an event aimed at younger ones but there is also increasing demand for storytelling events for adults. This event is highly inclusive and gives everyone a chance not just to come but to get involved. The event will appeal to people who have limited connection with the church as well as those who are part of the Christian community. As the main purpose of this event is to build relationships between the church and the wider community, ideally the demographic who attend will be a good mix of both.

WHERE?

A recent survey of churchgoing in the UK, identified that 60% of the UK are either un-churched (have pretty much never been inside one) or de-churched (have had a bad experience and don't intend to come back). For all of those people, church buildings can be scary places. This means that although we're hosting the party, there's good reason to host it in a neutral space. We're opting out of our church buildings as often as possible so for this event you need to find a local café, library or social club to host your event. This is a great opportunity to start building a relationship with a local business owner as well as find a great venue for your event.

WHEN?

This event can be run at a date that fits with your church's current rhythm of mission, taking into consideration how the event might compliment or clash with your existing church programme. Think about when is right for the people you are inviting. In order to maximise your appeal, choose a time that is not in competition with other events in the community. For this event a week night would be advisable as restaurants are less busy and more able to accommodate such an event. If many people in your community commute to work make sure you give them enough time to get back for the event.

MAKING IT HAPPEN!

1. CREATE A TEAM

You could run this event as a small group, a church or a group of churches. Your team will need to include:

- Someone who is happy to take overall responsibility for the organisation of the event including finding and liaising with the venue
- Someone who knows how to produce high quality publicity
- Someone who likes telling stories!
- Someone who is confident enough to host the event, including welcoming people, explaining the programme, introducing acts, coordinating games and wrapping up at the end of the night.

A recommended core team size is therefore between 3 and 5 people although you can still have lots more people involved!

2. DECIDE ON YOUR COMMUNITY BOUNDARIES

Clearly define who your event is aimed at. What geographical area will you be advertising to? Is it a street? A few streets? A postcode? Ideally, do not try to reach too large a geographical area as this increases costs in publicity and makes it more difficult to build lasting relationships through the event.

3. PLAN YOUR FOLLOW UP

Don't leave it until last minute to work out how this event will fit into the wider mission of the church. You need to have a plan in place for the following scenarios.

Scenario A: Someone comes to the event and they are already asking questions about faith and really want to know more. How will they find out more through this event or be invited into a context where they can discover more about the gospel. One way of doing this would be to use Donald Miller's Storyline book, a tool for helping a group to find their subplots in God's story. Storyline can be completed in a small group in only six weeks. For a complete small-group guide that will help you take a group through the entire Storyline process visit <http://www.mystoryline.net/storyline-at-home>

For other ideas download our 'Evangelistic follow up ideas' document.

Scenario B: Someone comes to the event without much knowledge of the Christian story and not particularly interested in finding out more. However, they love the event and are impressed that the church would put on something like this. Is there another event happening in the near future that you can invite them to?

Could you start a book club? See the 'What if' section at the end of this document for how to go about this.

Scenario C: Someone comes to the event without much knowledge of the Christian story and not particularly interested in finding out more. However, they are struck by the sense of community and would really like to hang out with people from the church more even though they are not yet interested in the Christian faith. Is there a social group (maybe a sports team, dance class or film club) that meets regularly they can be invited to become a part of?

4. BUDGET AND FUNDRAISING

This event is relatively cheap to run. You may need to pay for a venue but should not expect to have to pay more than £50 as it is quite a low key event.

- £50 venue
- £100 publicity
- £50 books to give out

This type of event is often free so it is not advisable to charge more than a nominal fee for yours. Coffee shops make ideal venues for storytelling and most will allow you to use the venue for free as long as people buy drinks. You should aim to make sure about £50 worth of drinks are bought in order to make it worth their while. You could come to an arrangement where you set up a tab or subsidise the drinks and give out vouchers if you have the capital. Printed publicity will need to be paid for a month or so before the event. You will also need a simple PA kit which your church will probably own. If not you can probably borrow from another local church.

Raising Finance

If your church or small group does not already have a mission fund that can help with some of the costs of this event you may have to look into some fundraising. This can be everything from cake sales and car washes, to council grants. Most local councils have small grant funds which faith groups can apply for and as your event will be benefitting local business there's a good chance of you being able to raise some funds through this. Visit your local council website for more details.

5. DESIGN YOUR EVENT

A storytelling event could be anything from an hour to about two and a half hours in length. For a longer evening you will need to break it up so people are not expected to sit and listen for too long. Have an interval, which will give people opportunities to chat. This is also helpful if you have a minimum spend to meet as it is a second opportunity for people to buy refreshments.

To increase the interactivity of the evening you could include some storytelling games. Here's one that works well:

Create a selection of cards with three random words written on each - the more random and esoteric the better. eg Octopus, Mud wrestling, Chapatti. Choose 3 contestants from the group to join in the game. Each player takes a card at random and has 2mins to tell a story which includes each of these words. At the end of their story the audience have to guess which words they had on their card. The player wins one point for every word the audience DOESN'T guess, i.e. if they've successfully hidden their words in the story. The winner is the person with the most points.

You could also consider giving your story telling evening a theme. For example, what about 'birthdays' as you celebrate the birthday of the church. Or you could pick a deeper theme like friendship or forgiveness or justice. If you choose to have a theme make sure the theme is broad enough that it allows for a whole variety of stories on the same theme.

Another idea is to include poetry in your event. Local spoken word artists or poets could add a further dimension to the evening, increasing its appeal to a wider audience. Alternatively you could invite in a Christian poet to share a few inspiring pieces.

It is important to strike a good balance between the amount of time spent sitting and listening to stories/poems and giving people the opportunity to engage in conversation with others.

6. BOOK YOUR VENUE

The Right Location

Look for somewhere close to the heart of the community you are trying to connect with, somewhere that is generally quite popular, is a pleasant, intimate space and can be arranged in such a way as to accommodate story telling

Meet the Manager

Arrange to meet the manager for a face to face meeting where you can chat through your vision for the event and how it would work logistically. Remember that this is about building relationships so take the time to get to know the manager if you can and let them know that you want to support his business and not just use his space.

Things to discuss with the venue manager:

- Explain who you are and what you are hoping to do.
- Propose the idea of a story-telling event and tell them how it would benefit them and your local community.
- Confirm an available time and date, including set up and set down time.
- How many people would they expect you to get in to make it worth it for them. Is there a minimum requirement they would need to make in sales?
- Can you bring in a simple PA kit?
- Are they happy for you to rearrange the space as required?
- Are you allowed to put up banners and bunting?
- Would they be willing to have posters and flyers up advertising the event in the two weeks leading up to the event.

Get it in Writing

When you have found the right place and have decided the above details make sure you write a follow up email to the manager with everything that has been agreed clearly laid out. Ask the manager to reply saying that they are happy with this. It's really important that you do this as it ensures transparency and avoids problems arising from miscommunication later in the planning of the event.

7. PUBLICISE

Flyers and posters

For an event of this size, publicity should probably be released between 2 and 3 weeks before the event. Make sure you get the flyer designed by someone who is able to produce a professional standard of work. The quality of the flyer will indicate to the recipient the quality of the event they are attending. Examples and help with flyers are available on our website.

Make sure the flyer clearly states the date, time, location and price of the event. Make it clear what is included in the price. If there is a website or social media platform for the event make sure this is also included on the flyer. Be sure to communicate who is running the event.

Make sure the flyer is a true representation of the content of the event. This means do not advertise the event as a storytelling night if you intend to include a 30 minute preaching slot. It is important to be honest with the public and let them know exactly what they are signing up for!

Places to distribute flyers/posters

- Door-to-door. Get a group from the church to post them in houses in the local area. Avoid doors that say "no junk mail". Even though I'm sure you do not consider it to be "junk", it's important to respect their right to disagree!
- Ask local shops if they are willing to put a poster in their window or to keep some flyers by the till.
- Put flyers/posters up on community notice boards
- Get local churches to put the event in their news bulletin and give out flyers. Encourage church members to bring friends to the event.

Other publicity

Use the internet, it offers you free publicity! If you have access to any local/church websites make sure the event is listed there. Also upload the event to any online local community calendars you can find - your council probably hosts one and there may well be others too.

Use social media, set up a Facebook group or get local tweeters tweeting about your event.

Let the local press know. Write a short press release about what you will be doing (see Communications doc online). Send it to your local papers or local news websites. Within 24 hours of the event send another press release about how the event went and include pictures. This will help promote the positive work the church is doing in your community.

Make sure you've registered your event properly so that it appears on *thebiggestbirthdaypartyever.com*. Don't forget to make use of the t-shirts and publicity, if you purchased a registration pack, to make a real visible presence on the day.

8. VOLUNTEERS AND STORYTELLERS

It is possible to book professional storytellers to come in and tell stories on the night but since this event is about building community you would be better off sourcing at least some of the stories from within the community. You should make the event open to people to come along and bring their stories but you will also want to encourage some people from your church(es) to let you know in advance that they are bringing a story so that you can be sure there are enough to last the time.

If you do decide you still want to book a storyteller from outside you can do so on this website. <http://www.sfsdir.org.uk/> Please be aware that Pentecost Festival have not worked with these storytellers before and are unable to verify their suitability for your event.

To help with the smooth running of the event it would be good to have two people who are not core team members there on the day to welcome people and make sure everyone is having a good time. This means core team members will have the time to make sure everything is running smoothly and to solve any problems that may arise. Don't forget to thank your volunteers at the end of the evening.

Make sure you remind your church members that they are not just there to have a good time with people they already

know but should be trying to meet new people and make them feel welcome throughout the event.

STEP 9. ON THE DAY

Here's a list of things to do on the day to ensure a smooth running event.

- Visit or call the venue early in the day to make sure they've remembered the event is happening!
- Call the storytellers you know are coming to check they are still happy to share a story
- Arrive at the venue around one hour before the event to set up the space.
- Set up a simple PA kit.
- Arrange to meet with the host for the night before the event to talk through the schedule and answer any questions they might have.
- Risk assess the venue using the form on our website.
- Make sure there is water on hand for the host throughout the show.
- Make sure you clearly communicate the follow up opportunities you have planned.
- At the end of the night be sure to thank the venue and ask for any feedback they are able to offer on how the event went.

How to share the meaning behind the party!

You'll want to make sure that people don't just go away having enjoyed the event but that they've also been challenged or intrigued about the Christian faith. However you choose to present the gospel, it must be short and informal and should not leave anyone feeling like they have been tricked into coming to be preached at! Here are a few ways you can share the meaning behind the party on the night.

Get the host to introduce the party with a little bit about why the event is taking place

Welcome to Storytelling brought to you by <insert church name here>. We're here tonight in celebration of The Biggest Birthday Party Ever – the birthday of the church. We thought we'd celebrate with stories because we believe God is a God who loves to tell stories! We hope you enjoy the evening!

If you purchased a registration pack, make use of your party bags to give people some fun stuff as well as The Biggest Birthday Party Ever booklet telling them a little bit more about why we have so much to celebrate.

Ideas to fill the party bag:

- A short story book
- A bookmark
- A mini chocolate bar
- A notebook /journal for writing down story ideas
- The Biggest Birthday Party Ever gospel booklet

Interview someone who is good at telling personal stories. Ask them to prepare answers that show how God has worked in their life. Here are a few questions you could use.

- Tell me a story of a really great day in your life
- Tell me a story of a really bad day in your life
- Tell me the story that has changed your life the most.

Get someone to write a modern day parable, perhaps using the story of an inspiring person they've come across or by adapting one of the stories Jesus told.

Buy a few copies of a good book. As part of the evening read a section and then offer people a free one if they would like. As an example, you could get some copies of William Young's *The Shack* or C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* and read a segment as a taster at some point during the evening.

Because this event is inexpensive to put on and does not take too much planning, if you get a lot of interest in this event it's one that you could easily make into a monthly activity. Think about whether this is something you might like to do ahead of the event and maybe collect emails on the night so that you can let people know about more regular events.

STEP 10. WRAP UP AND IMPLEMENT FOLLOW UP

It's important that this event fits into a wider context of mission. Therefore, get feedback from everyone involved about how they thought the event went. You could ask them to respond to three simple questions:

- What did you like about the event?
- What did you think could have been done better?
- If we were to run the event again what changes would you suggest?

Ask people to give you their details if they would like you to keep them updated about future events. Have a plan in place for your next event so that you can build on the good work you've begun.

WHAT IF...?

I WANT TO DO STORYTELLING FOR CHILDREN?

This could be great! A local library may be a more suitable environment than a coffee shop. You will also need to ensure that the people leading the session are CRB checked. It's probably best if you invite parents to stay with their kids if possible, maybe even create an area for them to drink tea and coffee at the back of the room. Decide on a target age as stories that will entertain five year olds may not be so appropriate for 15 year olds. Make sure you get someone who works with children of your target age to have a look at the stories being told and check them for suitability.

I DECIDE I WANT TO START A BOOK CLUB IN RESPONSE?

Great! Here's a quick 'how to' for running a successful book club.

- Choose a venue that will be appropriate, ideally the same venue as you held your storytelling event.
- Choose a book and then break it down into one/two chapter segments.
- Create a flyer showing exactly what chapters you will be discussing each week for an entire book. Don't forget to include dates, times and venue on the flyer too!
- At the event someone should be in charge of facilitating discussion. This does NOT mean that they speak all the time. They simply come armed with a few good questions from the chapters to encourage conversation.



MORE ABOUT SHARE JESUS INTERNATIONAL



SJI is passionate about communicating the good news about Jesus in our ever-changing times.

SJI's work covers three main areas:

1. Missional Leaders – leadership development has long been a focus for SJI. Over the past ten years, our leadership development programmes have seen in excess of one thousand young people trained to serve God in their communities. Find more details on the FRESH programme here
2. Missional Festivals – in 2008 we hosted London's first Pentecost Festival with over one hundred events, many of them free, in the heart of London. Since then the Festival has grown by collaborating with a wide range of organisations and churches. Now we are also training churches to run local festivals in their communities
3. Missional Churches – planting missional expressions of church locally, SJI is working to equip churches across the UK to be missionally focussed

For more information please visit our website: www.sharejesusinternational.com

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