

Choosing, Telling, and Bringing Stories to Life in Worship

Thursday, June 25 | 6pm-7:15pm US/Eastern (3:00 – 4:15PM PDT)

Stories are a powerful tool in worship — especially multigenerational worship. Laden with images, metaphors, playfulness, and truth, story provides a common language and shared experience across different generations and theologies. More than just teaching story-telling skills, our workshop will focus specifically on how to integrate meaningful stories into worship.

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Recommends “Worship Web” <http://www.uua.org/worship> <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/stories> <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/sophias-guest> as a resource.

Story flows where it is needed, and applies itself there, like an antibiotic. (CP Estes)

To be worship worthy,

- The story needs to honor the listener’s imagination, making room for their experience to take hold.
- Doesn’t try to explain everything—trust the listener.
- Has a rhythm and it makes sense.
- Lend themselves to script-free telling, with only a few points or images to remind teller.
- Contains an image or metaphor that can thread its way into the momentum of the worship service.
- Provides common narrative/congregational shorthand.
- Provokes wonder/surprise. Needs to make us wonder what happens next, complexity that needs resolution.
- Triggers campfire gene. Go back to our more ancient human heart/mind. Good story not about analyzing, but about feeling circle of fellowship.

Things that get in the way of effective storytelling:

- Overabundance of characters.
- Too much dialogue—use descriptive language.
- “He said” and “she replied” etc. Use gestures or voice to identify speaker.
- Puns. Half of audience roll eyes, half will try to out-pun you and don’t listen any more.
- Making the story about you. You should not be the hero of the story. Leave a place in the story for the listeners.
- When you are a worship leader, you should be the vessel for the congregation. You are not an entertainer, it is not about you.

If you are telling a story for all ages, don't interpret "inappropriate" in terms of subject matter rather than in terms of stories that are over the heads of younger listeners.

Experienced storytellers should mentor inexperienced storytellers.

Everyone should be on the same page about the meaning of the story. If it is integrated into the worship service, gains meaning.

Not good to tell a story if you haven't worked through the pain yourself.

Books:

- "The Shared Pulpit." <http://amzn.to/1JmxcDK>
- "A Good Telling" <http://amzn.to/1Ng99Lu>
- "Story, Song and Spirit" <http://amzn.to/1NgekLo>
- "Doorways to the Soul" <http://amzn.to/1GLPZeX>

Question: What to do if storyteller goes over as a worship leader or worship teacher?

Answer: It takes intention to build a strong worship life. Train with volunteers. Don't just take whoever volunteers.

Notes for effective stories:

- Abstract themes can be too big for stories. Bypass inert themes.
- Work backwards: What should people take away?
- Provide handholds and windows for people to enter the story and make connections.

With story for all ages, make the point of the story more explicit. Repeat what just happened. Also be clear as to the purpose of the story.

Channel your listener's "meaning making."

In worship, concentrate too much on the verbal. Not enough of the silences, the visual, other senses. Can use props. Visceral elements should be included.

Keep stories gender neutral. Include entire audience.

Don't memorize, but does help to rehearse.

Be aware of context of your congregation.

www.practicepublishing.org

www.uua.org/words/storytelling

