



## Put Spirited Storytelling into Youth Ministry



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Our lives are lived and told in story.

Youth ministry is about hearing the stories of young people, creating experiences that result in stories, and sharing with one another the story of God's work in this world through Jesus Christ.

Stories exist for every age and culture, every family and creation, every color and sound. Every person, regardless of age, has a story.



### Why Storytelling?

Stories have a way of weaving their way into our subconscious--both the stories of our own experiences and the stories we are told. Relationships are strengthened, decisions are made, new directions are considered, sorrow is healed and laughter is shared when stories weave their way into our lives.

Storytelling is an adventure. To say "Let me tell you a story" is like saying "Let's take a trip" or "Let's play." Storytelling takes us to the site of the story. Telling Bible stories takes us to the sacred places where our ancestors came to know God--the mountain, the sea, the marketplace, the desert, the temple and tomb.



### Storytelling Builds Community

Stories can be a source of personal growth, but mostly stories are about building community. Stories link an individual to the history of a group. Stories connect people to their families, friends, ancestors and culture.

The stories of scripture connect the people of God to their ancestors--those who heard and told the same stories. Learning to tell the stories of God was one of the primary tasks of every young person in the oral culture. Young people learned stories by listening to the sages--the wise women and men of the tribe--tell the stories. Helping young people learn and tell the stories from scripture is a gift youth leaders can give to young people and the community of faith.



## Using Biblical Story in Youth Ministry

Learning and telling Bible stories is liturgical. Storytelling involves both the teller and the listener. Not only does biblical storytelling build community, it nurtures biblical literacy and faith in young people. This Help Sheet focuses on telling the stories of scripture from memory. Many good resources are available to help you and your young people being writing the stories of God on your hearts. It may transform your life and ministry.

Try using biblical storytelling in these ways:



### ***Instead of Bible Study:***

- Put spark in a traditional Bible study by changing the focus from studying the Bible story to telling the story. Allow some time for teaching and discussing the story so the story isn't misinterpreted or told inappropriately. Focus on the learning and telling of the story, which stands on its own. We have spent centuries poring over the scriptures and debating scripture's mysteries and meanings. Rarely do we hear, learn and tell in the oral tradition of our ancestors.



### ***Retreats and Trips:***

- Choose a story that fits your retreat theme. Have retreaters "live" the story all weekend as they learn and tell it. Select several stories that fit a summer trip theme, location or purpose. If you're going to the mountains, use mountain stories as your focus. If your trip takes you to water, choose a water story for each day. On a servant event, invite youth to learn and tell stories that speak about service (Jesus washing the disciples' feet or feeding the multitude).



### ***Intergenerationality:***

- Don't keep the richness of biblical storytelling among young people. Use it as a tool for intergenerational ministry. Invite the sages and cherubs of the congregation to share their stories with one another. Having young and old share the stories of God and their own stories can bring about holy moments.



### ***In Worship:***

- *Telling* instead of reading Bible stories has a profound effect on worship. Form a small group that's willing to study the lectionary and learn stories for worship.



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## Steps to Storytelling

Storytelling is more like swimming than it is like hockey. Hockey takes an array of equipment, an ice rink and usually a team. Storytellers travel light. A Bible or good story teacher is all the equipment needed.

Try this four step approach:

- Read and learn about storytelling.
- Hear stories told well.
- Learn and tell stories yourself.
- Invite others to learn and tell.



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## Tips to Storytelling

- Divide the stories into episodes and learn them episode by episode. Episodes change when the action, scene or speaker changes.
  - Think the story instead of memorizing it. Study the story's structure and use key, repeated words as your guide in "re-experiencing" the story.
  - Think of the words in a sentence as "chunks" instead of laboriously spitting them back word by word. Just as "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" is one chunk, so is "inthosedaysadecreewentoutfromceaseraugustus."
  - Practice stories in the dead spaces of time--while trying to fall asleep, driving the car, waiting for an appointment, taking a bath or shower.
  - Good storytellers look for opportunities to tell their stories. That's why some people remember jokes and stories so well.
  - Don't panic in the pauses. Pauses are the life rafts of storytellers, says Tom Boomershine, master storyteller. And in pauses, listeners feel the presence, not the absence of God.
  - Gesture. It's been said that if you tie the hands of a storyteller, he or she will forget the story. Use your hands and body to tell and live the story.
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## **Don't Forget the Connections**

Young people (and adults) are quick to dismiss Bible stories as having no connection to their lives. Helping them make connections to the stories can convince them otherwise. When they learn the story of Jesus' baptism, have them share their own stories of being launched into something new--perhaps even storytelling.

Jesus made connections to the everyday lives of his listeners, using sheep, bread, wine, salt and light to prove his point. We, too, can connect our stories to those found in scripture. They both increase in their meaning.

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## **Additional Resources**

Many storytelling resources are available at bookstores and over the Internet. *Spirited Storytelling: Using Biblical Story in Youth Ministry* (1997 Augsburg Fortress) was written specifically to help youth leaders launch storytelling with congregational youth. It's accompanied by an audiotape featuring storytellers from the 1997 ELCA National Youth Gathering (Code #23-2345; \$10.99).

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