



# **IMPROVING YOUR STORYTELLING**

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I think we can agree that Jesus was a master storyteller. And the power of a well told story is irrefutable. When we tell stories of our people actively trusting God it is in part what inspires other people to take steps of faith, whether that is into community or generosity.

However, most Churches really struggle in this area. I sat down with one of our storytellers James Legg, Filmmaker/Ministry Coordinator at 12Stone, to talk about the problems teams face.

***Here are some common problems churches tend to run into, and thoughts on what you can do in this season to address them:***

# 1

## **WE ARE NOT STUDENTS OF THE CRAFT.**

- This is a bit ironic considering we live in a culture that obsesses over and binges great storytelling. The latest show to binge or the latest documentary series to consume is frequently the subject of conversation when we get together with friends and family. So, it is nearly criminal that the church isn't leaning into being students of this craft. Examples of great storytelling are all around us, both short form and long form.
- Remember, the church isn't just about telling stories of what God did, it is about telling stories about what He is doing now.
- Encourage your creative team to be students of great storytelling.
- If you don't have a video person who is a student of great storytelling, make it your goal this season to find one.
- Find inspiration. For storytellers, be a learner, sites like Master Class, or watching quality documentaries on Netflix and YouTube are helpful.
- Learn how to watch media without being entertained by it. When you feel something, stop, back up the video, and think, Why did that just move me? Be aware when stuff comes up internally as you watch great stories, Reverse engineer what you're seeing, and try it yourself.

# 2

## NOT EVERY STORY DESERVES EQUAL TIME.

- Develop a way to differentiate. James uses something like this: Think of stories as either snacks, meals, or nights on the town. Each one requires a different investment of time and emotional energy.

- **Snacks** (video 1-2 minutes or less; just a good story, not high production; or even just having a person telling it from stage with a picture)

- Here are some one-minute Instagram posts highlighting mission impact.

WATCH

WATCH

- **HERE** is an example of a social media post highlighting a clip of the weekend teaching.
- **HERE** is a two-minute faith journey story.
- **HERE** is a video that breaks the mold for time, and I hesitate to call this a snack, but it is low production and only one camera is used. This is a good example of fueling the missional priority of prayer while using social media. As a church with the missional vision to be rooted in prayer because of Jesus, we set out to do 150 days of praying through the psalms, posting a video every Wednesday to help model what that looks like.

- **Meals** (maybe 1-4 minute video) Higher production value.

WATCH

WATCH

- **Nights on the town** These stories deserve time and creative input, highest production value, more heart, and art, usually multiple interviews, longer timelines.

- Here are two long-form stories of brokenness, faith, and salvation and our missional focus of transforming souls because of Jesus.

WATCH

WATCH

- **HERE** is a long-form story highlighting the mission of transforming families, by focusing on foster care.

- Having stories of multiple lengths is helpful to weekend programming. In fact, it allows us to tell many more stories in multiple formats, including social media.

# 3

## **EDUCATE YOUR OTHER STAFF.**

- Stories can come from anyone: Pastors or Campus Pastors, a Lead Creative
- Talk to staff about how to look for a good story. Identify snacks, meals, nights on the town. Story elements that always work well go like this: “It should have been this way... but then this happened... only God could do that.”
- Or motivate the storyteller (video person) to take a walk around your small group leaders or outreach folks and ask: “What’s your favorite story in the last three months?”
- Creative personnel should always be cultivating good relationships with other departments.

# 4

## **LEARN HOW TO GET BETTER AT GOOD STORYTELLING AND INTERVIEWS.**

- A videographer’s pre-interview is where you look to find the true depth of the story. In general people struggle to talk about themselves, and it is the job of the pre-interview to find out if there is a status quo and a new status quo (what has really changed, and the emotion under that). It’s usually something bigger than, “I didn’t go to church and now I do.” Sadly, most churches tend to stop there.
- Curiosity to know more than just the bottom line is key. But this always involves trying to get the subject to start talking.
- When filming, develop an approach to break the ice (*this will feel like the awkwardness of a first date*). Something like:
  - With camera rolling, ask three burner questions such as: How did you come to our church? If interviewing a couple, then ask how did you meet? What do you know the most about? Listen for a bit, just to get them comfortable talking.
  - When you turn to the story don’t just focus on the details, find out what was hard about it—how they really felt. Don’t settle for surface answers. Keep probing with questions like, “Can you tell me when it was worst?”
- Some people are natural storytellers, so let them do their thing. Just help them focus, and coax others when needed.
- Conflict is your friend. The bad parts of a story help us understand the best part. The dark parts make the light parts brighter.
- Interview twice in two locations, particularly if one of the locations is critical to the story. Any way you can make it more real will help tell the story.

# 5

## LEARN THE ART OF EDITING.

- You are looking for the best hook, therefore contrast matters. Use irony, like a question or statement that hooks people early on.
- Editors should focus on getting the least amount of essential information in. Don't overload the audience with detail. You'll often have to go through the story line by line and ask yourself: Does this lead us to the story we want to tell? Bring in another trusted person who isn't as familiar with the story to view the edit and see if it is clear.
- B-roll is key for more long form or highly produced pieces. Think, "not just talking heads. Think, "show don't just tell."
- On big stories, think about separating the shoot. First, focus on only the interview. Then, after the initial edit, move to B-roll, because then you are choosing B-roll more specifically. This is particularly true for a Nights on the Town type of video.
- Use Motion Graphics to vision cast informational pieces. Best for more information, Motion Graphics clarify and visualize much better than talking heads.
- [HERE](#) is a clip highlighting a missional effect to address hunger