

## Choosing Talk Titles

### 1. It's Important!

- We believe that God's words are powerful to change lives. Therefore the talk is the central part of each event.
- You will be surprised how many people will come to the events because they are intrigued by a good talk title! Not everyone comes just for the food or the music!
- We want people to come expecting a talk; ready to listen and interact with what is said.
- It looks much better having an attractive and engaging title than simply saying 'with a short talk' - this begs the question 'a talk about what?' and sounds like a warning rather than an invitation!
- It is vital that you keep good communication with your speaker in this process. You need to be happy with the titles because you have to invite your friends, but the speaker also needs to be happy with them, as they have to deliver the talks! They may also have ideas that they would like to feed in to the discussion, and they may have particular expertise on particular topics.

### 2. How to decide which topics to cover

We want to 'scratch where people itch', so it is important that the titles engage with the questions people are asking and the issues that people care about. We shouldn't assume that we already know what people's biggest issues are – these can be far-ranging, depending on the country or the individual university setting.

A great way to decide upon this is to conduct a survey of the students. You could ask people *'What is your main objection to the Christian faith?' or 'If you could ask God one question, what would it be?'*

Get every member of the student group to do this with at least 5 friends. This is a brilliant way of getting them to talk to their friends – but it is easy to do – the students don't have to give the answers to the questions – instead they can invite their friends to hear the answers when the mission takes place!

You could also go out into the university and do this as a form of 'first contact evangelism'. The more people you ask, the more representative the results will be.

Get people to fill in their response with a thick marker pen on a preprinted A5 sheet of paper – these can then be collated and displayed during the week itself as an attractive and intriguing display.

It may then be possible to write an article for the student newspaper, where you publish the results of the survey and tell people that you are going to tackle the questions during the mission. This gives you free advertising and prompt curiosity.

The student group in Malta, for example, conducted such a survey during the first week of term when everyone was arriving at university. Despite having only 2 members, they worked hard, and got over 500 responses... including one from the Prime Minister of the country! The responses were grouped into similar topics, and the top 5 were used to determine the lunchtime talks for their mission week.

### 3. Best timing for covering the different titles.

#### *Lunchtime vs. Evening*

- It is good to cover objections to Christianity at the lunchtime events, (e.g. Why would God allow suffering? How can we trust the Bible?). People are often coming to the event in between other lectures and so the talk needs to be short and snappy with time for questions at the end.
- Tackling common existential desires works well for the evening events (e.g. Identity, Success, Freedom, Hope etc). The evenings are more relaxed and people have more time - they are not worried about what they have to do next. It is, therefore, a better time to connect with issues of the heart. Alternatively, you can go for a series of talks which much more specifically focuses on the person of Jesus (see examples below) but with personal application and challenge. The format of the evening events also allows of the use of drama, music and testimony.
- If you are *only* doing evening events, then you may want a combination of both the intellectual objections and existential desires through the week (starting with the former and moving on to the latter).

#### *Progression through the week*

- Some talks deal with the intellectual objections (science, evidence for God, the Bible etc) and others with moral objections (suffering, intolerance, hell etc). It is the answers to the moral objections that often most naturally take you to Jesus and the heart of the Gospel. For this reason it is better to start with the intellectual objections and the move to the moral objections. You want to build

up to the talks that most naturally allow you to present Jesus and challenge people to response.

- Similarly it is good to think about progression with the evening titles. The cross and resurrection of Jesus are at the heart of the gospel (1 Corinthian 15:3-8) so while these are mentioned throughout the week it is good to make specific time to focus on them at the end of the week. We find that for the final two evenings it is good to pick titles that allow you to focus on the cross and the resurrection. For a talk on the cross you could use topics like Forgiveness / A fresh start / Guilt / Shame / Failure. For a talk on the resurrection you could use topics like Hope / The Future / Life and Death. The added advantage of finishing the week by looking at the resurrection is that this combines both the truth and the goodness of the gospel in the same talk. It is also something that you can advertise throughout the week in response to people's questions.

#### *Examples of lunchtime topics*

Good at the start of the week:

- Science/Rationality and God
- Evidence for God
- Reliability of the gospels
- Faith as a psychological crutch
- Does the Bible repress women?
- Are miracles impossible?

Good at the end of the week:

- Arrogance of Christianity / Only one way?
- Suffering and the problem of evil
- The question of hell

#### *Examples of evening topics*

Existential desires:

- Identity
- Success / Meaning / Purpose
- Freedom
- Life / Satisfaction
- Forgiveness
- Hope

Clearly Jesus-focused:

- Who was Jesus?
- What does Jesus offer?

- Why is his death relevant to me?
- How is the resurrection possible?
- What does it mean to follow him?

#### 4. Deciding on the wording of the actual titles

- Questions work better than statements. Try to use open questions that get people to think. 'Why would a God of love send people to hell?' is intriguing and thought-provoking. 'Does God ruin my fun?' is not so good – everyone else assumes 'yes', but presumes that we will say 'no'!
- Phrase questions in a way that people would actually ask them. For instance, we find that 'How can you claim that there is only one way to God?' works better than 'Do all religions lead to God?'... For many people, the issue is less about other religions, and more about the perceived arrogance and intolerance of claiming that everyone else is wrong.
- You want to word the question in such a way that it sounds like it will be difficult for the Christian to answer. This is more provocative but also stops guests feeling like things have been weighted in favour of the speaker/Christians.
- Make sure that it is clear what the talk is about. It may be necessary to use a subtitle if the main title is not clear enough. The title should not need explaining. While this is possible when you invite your friends it is not when you are flying on a busy street. In fact a good test to see how engaging your title is, is to imagine shouting it out in a busy student union – would it grab people's attention. Does it make them want to know the answer?
- It is good to link the titles together, so that it is obvious that they are part of a series. The easiest way to do this is to connect the titles to the theme of the week. Some will work easily; others will take more effort to include. It may not be possible to do this for both the lunchtime and evening events, but at least one of the series needs to be linked.

#### 5. Examples of good titles

The examples below show how you can work common objections / existential desires into a series of talks that fit with a common theme. You will notice that many of the same topics are covered in each series, but the question can be phrased differently to fit with the theme.

##### *The Search*

(If the mission week only had evening events then you could use a combination of the lunch and evening titles)

#### Lunchtime Titles

- In search of the historical Jesus – can we really know anything about him?
- In search of the God of the Old Testament – is he a moral monster?
- In search of tolerance – how can there be only one way to God?
- In search of answers – why would a God of love allow suffering?
- In search of justice – how could God send good people to hell?

#### Evening Titles

- The search for real identity – who am I and what am I worth?
- The search for real love – where can it be found?
- The search for real forgiveness – can the past be wiped clean?
- The search for real hope – is there life after life?
- The search for real life – how can I live life to the full?

### ***Jesus for Sceptics***

#### Lunchtime Titles

- Sceptical about God – what's the evidence for his existence?
- Sceptical about the Bible – how can I trust it?
- Sceptical about religion – how can there be only one way to God?
- Sceptical about a God of love – why does he allow suffering?
- Sceptical about hell – how could God send people there?

#### Evening Titles

- Jesus for Sceptics - Who was he?
- Jesus for Sceptics - What does he offer?
- Jesus for Sceptics - How is his death relevant to me?
- Jesus for Sceptics - Isn't his resurrection impossible?
- Jesus for Sceptics - What would it mean to follow him?

### ***Convinced?***

#### Lunchtime Titles

- Convinced faith is just a psychological crutch or a social construct?
- Convinced God should make himself clearer?
- Convinced Christianity is arrogant?
- Convinced suffering disproves God?
- Convinced hell is incompatible with a God of love?

#### Evening Titles

- Convinced Jesus is boring?
- Convinced Jesus is just for religious types?

- Convinced Jesus was just a great teacher?
- Convinced Jesus' death is irrelevant?
- Convinced Jesus' resurrection is impossible?

### ***What kind of God?***

Lunch time titles only

- Distant, disinterested and silent – WHAT KIND OF GOD DOESN'T MAKE HIMSELF CLEARER?
- Rape, Child Abuse and AIDS – WHAT KIND OF GOD DOESN'T STOP IT?
- Crusades, inquisitions and car bombs – WHAT KIND OF GOD ALLOWS VIOLENCE IN HIS NAME?
- Hypocritical, judgmental and divided? WHAT KIND OF GOD LETS THE CHURCH REPRESENT HIM?
- Condemning, unjust and arbitrary – WHAT KIND OF GOD SENDS SINCERE PEOPLE TO HELL?

### ***Uncover***

*(Evenings only - An example of a mission which only had evening events so we used a combination of the topics normally used at lunchtimes and in the evenings.)*

- Uncover faith – is God just a psychological crutch?
- Uncover value – am I only matter and do I even matter?
- Uncover suffering – does it disprove God?
- Uncover forgiveness – how can a fresh start be possible?
- Uncover hope – is there life after life?