

STORYTELLING

I. What is a story?

- A. The transmission of something more than information
 - 1. Lessons transmit information, facts, laws, doctrines, truths, etc.
 - 2. Stories transmit all of this, but not mainly in the way of giving teachings, but in the way of illustrating the teaching or the main point of the story in the lives and experiences of people. In this way it is easier for the listener to catch the main point, and to also reach an audience with a diversity of age groups, backgrounds, or experiences.
 - 3. Stories *embody* the lessons; that is, the lesson is actually hidden within the story itself.

II. The impact of a storytelling

- A. Mere teachings are harder to understand and to apply to our life-experience than are stories.
- B. Teachings are like “solid food”, whereas stories are an easier form of the food to receive, understand and apply to one’s life; kind of like the help a drink of water gives when one is eating a large meal.
- C. Teachings educate the mind by giving information, whereas a story mainly impacts the heart and feeling.
- D. Generally speaking, we usually forget mere teachings, but stories are etched into us for life.
- E. The Bible is mainly a collection of stories. The teachings, laws, truths, and even the revelations contained in it are transmitted to us mainly through the writings of the history of God’s people, stories told, or parables. Thus, both the Old Testament and the New begin with *stories* (like the “milk” for new readers) and then gradually lead the reader on to the teachings (like the “solid food”).
 - 1. In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, the Word of God is purely transmitted through the stories recorded.
 - 2. In the second book of the Bible, Exodus, in chapters 1-19 are many stories, but after that it begins to mainly talk about laws, ordinances, and instructions.
 - 3. The third book of the Bible, Leviticus, is much more difficult reading material for younger readers or new Bible readers because it is mainly a record of God’s laws and ordinances, with few stories.
 - 4. The four Gospels are mainly stories concerning the life of Jesus; they do not have many chapters of teachings (such as in Matthew 5-7, or John 14-17). Generally speaking, the teachings are embodied in the parables Jesus told or stories the writers relate to the readers.
 - 5. The book of Acts is mainly a story relating the move of the Spirit through the apostles and disciples.

6. Then, after five books that mainly relate stories, the Epistles come, which mainly give us teachings to help explain to us the spiritual truths. Yet, even in the Epistles many experiences of the writers are mingled in frequently.

III. The art of storytelling

- A. Good storytelling requires a good amount of preparation. Without good preparation it is impossible to infuse something into others that will impact them.
 1. The storyteller must be very well acquainted with the theme of the story – he should not need any papers, notes, or even just a good memory when he tells his story. The story must flow out in a very personal way from his heart, his inspiration, and his enjoyment.
 2. In order to arouse an appreciation of the story being told, the storyteller must know facts and details that are not explicitly given in the Bible. For example, when telling the story of the virtues of a young woman, using the story of Rebecca in Genesis 24 when she offered water to an old and tired traveler, Eliezer - she offered the water to both him *and his camels!* In order to bring forth the main points about the virtues of Rebecca, the storyteller must consider a number of points NOT mentioned in the Bible. Such as, what kind of “well” was it that Rebecca “came up” from? How many gallons of water does a thirsty camel drink after a long journey? And how much water would TEN camels drink? How many gallons would her water pot hold? How many trips did she have to make to go down to the well and bring up the water to quench the thirst of *ten* camels? How long might have that taken? One hour? Two? Then, after laboring carefully and patiently to arouse the interest of the audience in calculating all of this, in a very spontaneous way, the main burden of the story, the virtues of Rebecca, is very powerfully highlighted. The listener can almost visually see that she was a person of a willing and serving spirit, she was friendly, she was respectful of the elderly, and she was *very* noble. Then, when the impact of her wonderful character is fully illustrated, the storyteller can ask: What kind of woman would *you* choose for Isaac? What kind of woman would *you* like to marry if you were Isaac? Thus, without explicitly “teaching” about virtue, the storyteller has illustrated virtue in a most impressionable and unforgettable manner.
 3. A storyteller cannot transmit interest, appreciation, enlightenment or inspiration into others if he has not received this first himself and enjoyed it. The more one talks with others about the story that he is developing the more light he will receive. “Practice makes perfect.”
- B. Stories should be told in such a way that takes into account what particular interest or application it might have to the audience he is speaking to.
 1. Study and consider what kind of audience you are speaking to. How is it? What is their level of education or understanding? What is their situation at this very moment? (Are they hurried? “Forced” to be in a class? Uneasy? Are they hungry or thirsty? Do they need a snack first? Have they just come in

- from an outdoor activity that tired them, or from a meeting with the adults that may not have interested them at all?
2. If it is possible, BEFORE saying anything to them, sit down with the children or young people and listen to them a bit while they enjoy a snack. Whatever they are talking about is what they are interested in at that moment.
- C. Tell the story in an informal way
1. Do not take the position of being their “teacher” by always standing up in front of them as in a classroom, or by announcing: “Today I will tell you a story about....”
 - a) They will realize that you are actually just giving them another “lesson”, even though you are trying to “disguise” it as a story.
 - b) Eventually, after many years of being in children’s meetings and young people’s classes, when they hear the serving one say, “I am going to tell you a story today....” – this may tip them off that now is the time to fool around.
 - c) Rather, the storyteller should speak like friend to friend, not standing up in front of them in the way a professor teaches a class. It will be helpful to walk around among them, to sit down with them and to converse with them in an intimate way.
 - d) Ask them questions about their lives, their families, their homes, their schools, their classes, their studies, their friends. Don’t expect them to enter into your “world” – rather, you should come down and enter into their “world.” As you do this you will learn where their needs, difficulties, and problems are. [After examining the wounded traveler, the Good Samaritan poured the wine and oil upon his wounds, not all over him in a general way.]
 - e) All of this helps to open them up. As one brother said it: “Once the garage door is open, you can drive anything into it – a bike, a car, a truck!” If they are not open, you cannot put anything into their inner being.
- D. Infusing the main point into them
1. When you reach that moment in the storytelling that you touch the main point you want to inscribe into them, infuse it with much expression and even passion. Repeat it a little bit, but do not overdo it.
 2. After infusing the main point into them, end the story soon after that. Do not dwell on the same theme too much. Do not underscore the moral of the story or the main point too much, as one does when he gives a “lesson.” Trust that the seed sown will work in them, and that God will give them understanding, application, and growth during the course of their days and lives.
 3. Telling stories is like giving an injection – there is a time BEFORE the injection is given when the nurse gives a brief explanation to the patient, which calms him a bit. [In our application, it *opens him up* a bit]. Then, the injection is given quickly and carefully. And finally, the topic is changed and the patient goes

ahead with his ordinary activities. Once the “injection” of a well told story is given, it will remain with the listener, and will do its work.

The entire *Life-study of First Thessalonians*, message Thirteen is very good on the matter of setting patterns before the believers. The same principle applies to new ones in the church as well as young believers. Here’s a brief quote taken from that message:

PRESENTING A PATTERN

To give the new believers and young ones a lot of teaching is not the proper way to take care of them. The proper way to foster them is to show them a pattern. By showing them a pattern you water them, supply them, nourish them, and cherish them. This is fostering. If you find that your experience is somewhat lacking, point the new believers to different people in the Bible, for example, to ones such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and David in the Old Testament and Peter, John, Paul, and Timothy in the New Testament. We can present the lives of Bible characters in such a way as to foster the growth of the young ones.

If we give too much teaching to new ones and young ones, we shall damage them. Every mother knows that one of the most important matters in the raising of children is proper feeding. Caring for children is ninety percent a matter of feeding and ten percent a matter of teaching. This also should be our practice in caring for new believers in the church. We must learn to have ninety percent feeding and ten percent teaching. Feeding involves the presenting of patterns either from the Bible or from church history. By reading the biographies of saints throughout the ages, we nourish ourselves and experience a kind of fostering. The point here is that the best way to feed others and foster them is to give them a proper pattern. If there is no pattern, there can be no fostering. Only by having a pattern can we feed others.

In the book of 1 Thessalonians Paul was not preaching himself. Rather, he was feeding his spiritual children with his own living of Christ. This means that Paul’s way of living was used to feed his spiritual children. This was the reason he emphasized his coming to the Thessalonians, his preaching, his way of handling the word of God, and his manner of living. (*Life-study of First Thessalonians*, p. 110)

The second matter I would mention is that in telling stories, we have to learn how to “inspire” the children by what we show them. Our lessons should be to *show* them, not teach them. Too many teachers only know how to explain and teach. They do not know how to inspire and show. These are two great factors of a good lesson.

Finally, I would also add that the lessons, stories, must touch their hearts. You have to learn how to move them by what we show them or tell them. Their hearts must be touched.