

REACHING CHILDREN

By

Mildred Morningstar

Copyright © 1944

by MOODY PRESS

~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~

CHAPTER FOUR

TELLING THE STORY

"I love to tell the story, For some have never heard
The message of salvation From GOD's own holy word."

TELLING the Gospel story - what a priceless privilege!

Angels desire to tell it, but they cannot because they have never been redeemed. No other message is as sweet to the ear as the good news of salvation. Little children who love stories anyway are doubly glad to hear this sweetest of all stories. The story is so precious to GOD that He has filled His Word with it: a shadow of it here, a suggestion of it there, a golden nugget partly revealed in another passage, until we come into the full glory of the complete revelation given the apostle Paul.

All in all, we have a voluminous collection of stories all heading up in one subject, GOD's beloved Son.

How can we best tell these stories? What will make our storytelling more effective? It is to answer these questions that this chapter is written.

WHAT TO TELL

Is a story with a moral just as good as a Bible story? By no means. "**For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword**" (Hebrews 4:12). [85]

Use the Bible story in your class, and your children will grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. There is no literature in the world which surpasses the Bible.

Thus in giving the child the Bible you are giving to him a cultural background as well as a spiritual foundation.

In cases where the children meet more than once a week, or for a lengthy period of time, a missionary story may be included for variety, but even this should not take the place of the Bible

story. Other incidents may be used as illustrations within the story, but first and foremost is the story from GOD's own Word. A series of stories with a central theme is generally best to follow.

One person starting to teach children for the first time said, "I'm just going to teach out of my head and tell them all I know."

This is a mistake, for those who have had experience have points of value to pass on to those who follow. If one ever did try to get along without the helps, it should be only after years of experience in teaching children the Word of GOD.

Preparing to tell the story is almost as important as the actual telling, for the results depend largely on this factor. Last minute study, no matter how intensive, is never as favorable to good storytelling as that which takes place over a period of time. The mind and heart need time to think and to meditate, during which the HOLY SPIRIT has opportunity to speak to the teacher.

Several weeks beforehand read a few of the stories you are to tell, and at least a week before telling a particular story start your preparation. In this way the story will be thoroughly mastered by the time it is to be told. The details are not hazy in the mind, and new points of spiritual truth are discovered each time the story is read. [86]

The teacher's preparation is not complete until she knows the story thoroughly.

Reading it in the Bible comes first, then the helps follow.

Some people find help in making a brief outline of the story, and by putting down on paper the main points, they master the trend of the story.

But the preparation is not all intellectual, it includes the heart as well.

If the story means something to the teacher it will mean something to the children.

A great Bible teacher once said, "If we speak out of our heads the message will enter into the heads of our listeners, but if we speak out of our hearts, it will enter into their hearts."

Conduct is changed because of a change of heart.

Therefore since we wish to influence the heart, we must see that our own heart is warmed by the story.

A very conscientious teacher said, "Telling the story is so much easier for me now. I used to study so carefully, attend a teacher training class, and then try to tell the story exactly as it was told there. One day the leader told us that the HOLY SPIRIT desired to use us in the telling of the story, and that we should depend upon Him. Now I still study carefully, and I still attend the teacher training class, but instead of trying so hard in my own strength, I turn it over to the Lord, and He brings new light on the story as I go about my housework. It is much easier now. I tried hard before, but now He just seems to do it."

For those who have not had much experience, practice is almost imperative.

One young man got his start as a minister by preaching to the cabbage heads on his father's farm.
[87]

The teacher of little children may practice on her own children, those of a neighbor, or even on the breakfast dishes. Many are just afraid of the sound of their own voices, and this oral practice aids in attaining poise before a group. The teacher will be more than repaid for the effort involved in getting adequate preparation.

HOW TO TELL IT

With Forcefulness

If the story has forcefulness and expression, it is really a good one. To make her story forceful, the teacher should first of all have a purpose in telling it.

She is not just telling a story, she has a point that she wants to put across, something she wishes to accomplish in the lives of the children.

At first this great aim should be to lead the children to CHRIST, but later on it may include leading them into closer fellowship with CHRIST, causing them to desire to yield their lives to Him for service, or making them want to give their testimony at every opportunity. The story is a means to an end, and not the end itself.

After the aim has been decided upon, the teacher should build to a climax. It is as if she were building a children's slide.

Each point is another step in the ladder, with the climax at the peak where the slide starts. In building a slide, even if one had a very attractive piece of lumber, if it were not long enough for a step he would not use it. It is the same way in a story. No matter how good a point is, if it does not fit, do not use it. Eliminate all extraneous material.

In telling a story, the things you leave out are just as important as the things you include. [88]

Every sentence should bring you one step nearer the climax.

A little suspense goes a long way in making an interesting story. Don't give the ending to your story too soon. In telling of Daniel and the lions, don't say at the beginning of the story, "But the lions didn't get him." That is to throwaway your suspense. Keep the children sitting on the anxious seat wondering what will happen next.

With Expression

Everyone loves a story that is well told. Putting expression into the words, the voice, and the body aids considerably in making a well-told tale. Use words that give a vivid picture of the scene, by giving the specific details.

In telling of David, either of the following statements might be used, but the latter is more graphic, because the specific details are given. We get a clearer picture of what actually

happened.

"An animal came from behind something and attacked a sheep."

"A lion sprang from behind the bushes, and sank his teeth into the throat of a sheep."

Comparison often makes clear to little children those things which are outside their experience.

Some city children have never seen thorns, yet if it is explained that they are sharp like needles, but grow on bushes, the story of the crucifixion will be more real to them. The thorns which were outside of the realm of their knowledge were compared to needles which were familiar to them.

Comparison is of great value in linking the known to the unknown. Use it freely in Bible stories, for it will aid in greater comprehension. Like comparison, contrast clears up the meaning. [89]

Instead of telling what points are similar, it shows the places of difference.

In telling of the two thieves, the teacher could say, pointing to the crosses drawn on the board or displayed on the flannelgraph, "This man, because he accepted CHRIST, had eternal life, but this man did not. This man was going to paradise, but the other would never get to go because he did not believe in JESUS. The first thief would be with JESUS forever and ever, but the second thief could not be. This man had his sins forgiven, but the other one died without forgiveness."

Thus from a Bible story the children get clearly the difference between the saved and the lost. If you want to make your Bible stories live, make the words expressive by using specific detail, comparison, and contrast.

Expression in the voice makes it pleasant to listen to, and consequently the story is more attractive.

We have all listened to preachers whose never-changing drone puts the congregation to sleep. It requires much more effort to listen to a monotone than to the voice whose pitch is first high, and then low. A monotone is like listening to one note on the piano played again and again with no other notes included.

The human voice as given by GOD is capable of great variation. Why employ only one tone when He has given so many? A little practice in conversation by deliberately changing the pitch of the voice will make it easier in telling the story.

The same degree of loudness may be almost as tiresome as a monotone.

Some points are more effective if made in a soft low voice. If you notice the children becoming restless, try either raising or lowering your voice, and very often their attention will be regained. [90]

In the same way, speak slowly part of the time, and quickly at other times.

To give the impression of rapid action speak quickly and use short sentences.

Likewise, to convey a peaceful, quiet effect, employ a low voice with long sentences.

Change the voice to a high pitch when one character speaks, and to a low tone when the other character answers, and with just this variation the children will see two people carrying on a conversation.

Use conversation whenever you can, quoting the words which the character used, or might have used. Direct discourse makes a story vital. Use it whenever possible, taking care to label it as such if imagination is employed.

A pleasing voice can adorn the Gospel very effectively.

When some people speak before an audience it seems that every part of their body is frozen except their tongue. Yet those same people will show a group of friends how long the fish was, how tall the child was, or how the old man stroked his beard. They use their body to get across their point.

We do not need to be actors to tell a good story, but we do need to be natural, and it is natural to use our bodies at least part of the time when we are talking. You may think that you could never move before the children, but if you do it consciously a few times, it will soon become natural, and the children will really enjoy the story more.

One small boy watched Miss Frances Bennett, the master storyteller, as she showed how David wound up his sling, and when she made the motion to let the stone go, this little boy ducked. The expression in her body made the story that real to him. For those who would carry this advice of bodily movement too far, a word of warning is given.

Never allow your gestures or bodily movements to become ridiculous, so that your audience laughs at you. [91]

That is to cheapen and degrade the message.

When movements detract the attention from the story to themselves, then you have gone too far.

It is like everything else, we need to strike a balance: too much in either direction is wrong. But with the right amount of expression in the words, the voice and the body, the story can really live for the children.

With the Power of the Lord

Last of all, and most important, to tell a good story one should depend upon the Lord and not upon his own ability.

The stories of the most educated are insipid without His help, and those of the willing ones without much training may be used to eternal glory if they are told in the power of His HOLY SPIRIT. "Little is much if GOD is in it."

Who knows what the simple telling of the Gospel story shall mean to the boys and girls around about us?

I love to tell the story,
'Twill be my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story
Of JESUS and His love. [92]

~ end of chapter 4 ~
