**STORYTELLING**

**WHY TELL STOIRES?**

We are people of stories. God created us to enjoy telling stories and listen to those told by others. Through sharing we communicate passion, fear, joy and sadness. There’s something almost magical about a well-told tale—it pulls us and makes our hearts pound, tears swell, and brings comfort.

The stories in this book have been told at thousands of campfires. I am not sure if anyone knows who told them first. Whoever created them would not recognize them as they exist on these pages. Every time a story is told, the teller changes it by making it their own. The story will never be the same again.

Think of the campfire—of the flickering, dancing flames. The fire is made from the same wood, but it burns differently. The flames flow, change direction, and take on a form of their own. Stories are like that fire–familiar but also unique. They draw people in and hold them together in warmth.

Campfire stories are for reading, for telling, and retelling. Use them the way you like them best, and as you pass the story and on to one another, remember you are part of a great campfire tradition.

**LEARNING A STORY**

Ways To Learn Your Story

Try reading your story over and over again. Meditate on it throughout the day. It might help to type or write it out. Draw a story chart. Some people prefer to just start telling it at once.

Memorization

Parts of the story can be memorized word for word such as beautiful beginnings and endings, important dialog, colorful expressions, rhymes, or repeated phrases. Don’t try to memorize an entire story that way. Strict reciting creates a distance from your listeners that is hard to bridge.

Picture The Story

Imagine the scenes in your mind as clearly as possible. These images will help you recreate your story later as you tell it in front of your audience, whether you consciously recall them or not. Meet the characters. What do you think they look like? What are their names? How do they sound? How do they move? Watch the action in the story. Actually hear their conversations. Before you tell a story to someone, mentally witness the events yourself. After you have done that, you can relate them to your audience. Even if the story is fiction, think of it as though it actually happened and you were there.

Mirrors

It’s beneficial to practice your story with a “mirror.” This can be an actual mirror, or an audio/video recorder, or a friend. The mirror will help you know how you’re doing.

Absorb The Story

It should become second nature. Your goal is to internalize the storyline. The version you tell won’t convey everything from the original story, but it has to make sense. Once you have the storyline down, focus on how you tell it.

**STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES**

Repetition

Stories usually repeat important events three times. Pay special attention to repeated phrases or rhymes. Repetition helps your listeners follow the story by providing specific landmarks.

Variety

With repetition it is also important to use variety. Change your tone, pitch, volume, speed, rhythm, and articulation of your voice. You can even use pauses. Variety catches the audience’s attention.

Body Language

Use gestures but only as they help the story. Act out some of the actions and make them BIG. Gestures keep the audience’s eyes on you. When two characters are in a conversation, try using “cross-focus”. Position the characters at opposing 45-degree angles. This will allow the audience to visually follow the conversation.

Pay attention to how you portray your characters. Give them existence through facial expressions, voice, posture, and gestures.

Your body is your instrument

Project your voice and sustain it throughout your story. In order to do this, make sure you’re breathing deeply and correctly. To do this, place your hand on your stomach and inhale. You should feel your stomach push out as your lungs expand. Many people do the opposite, holding their stomach in and expanding their chest. Keep your back straight so that your lungs can fully expand.

Don’t push your voice too hard or use it unnaturally (unless for a specific voice). Relax your throat and jaw along with the rest of your body. Try letting out a big long sigh, or the “lion’s yawn” by opening up your mouth wide and sticking out your tongue as far as you can.

Beginnings and Endings

Pay special attention to the way a story starts and ends. You may want to memorize an introduction to go along with your story. If you are

speaking to a younger audience, try presenting your moral or purpose at the beginning so they know what to look for as the story is told.

Also, your audience should be aware of when your story ends without you having to tell them it is. A good way of doing this is slowing down and putting emphasis on your words such as, “happily ever after” or “that’s the end of that” or “and they never saw him again.

**BEST PRACTICES**

Check Your Space

Try to create an environment that is comfortable, intimate, and free from distractions. Take a look at your space ahead of time so you can spot problems and arrange any special needs—a stool, a glass of water. Try to have some time along beforehand to collect yourself or to “warm” up your body and voice.

Make It Personal

Give your listeners everything you’ve got. Project your words to the back row so that everyone can hear you. Avoid using filler words like “um” or “y’know”. Face your audience squarely and with a straight back. Avoid fidgeting, putting your hands in your pockets, or bouncing from foot to foot.

Make a personal connection with your listeners. Talk to them—not at them—and don’t be afraid to talk with them. Try to make eye contact with your audience. If you have a hard time scanning all of them, focus mainly on the first row. If some aren’t paying attention, focus on the ones who are.

Pace Yourself

As you tell your story, take your time allowing your listeners to “see” the story, time to laugh, feel, reflect, and hang on the edge of their seats for what comes next. It’s easy to go too fast and hard to go too slow. If it appears that you are losing your audience’s attention, try slowing down.

Be Interactive

As your audience responds to your story, allow your story to respond to your listeners. Make your voice and gestures “bigger” or “smaller”. Stretch or shrink parts of the story paying attention to what works and what doesn’t, so that next time you can add or subtract.

**A STORY’S END**

A good story captivates the audience, but a great story leaves them with a deep truth to consider long after the fire has burned out. Not every story’s message is self-evident and it is often necessary to explain its meaning.

Strong applications are firmly rooted in God’s Word. It is tempting to simply slap a related verse to the end of a story and close in prayer. A storyteller’s goal is not only to convey a compelling story but to communicate a biblical truth.

To deliver a conclusion that makes an impact, include these elements:

State the “Takeaway”

Each story should have one main takeaway point that the audience will consider. This is the moral or lesson that you are trying to illustrate. Take time to craft a simple and memorable way to say it. Remember to pull this truth out from Scripture.

Relate Common Needs

A great way to help deliver your takeaway is to describe common needs. This will connect your audience to the message. Start with a personal example of how the lesson addresses a need in your life— then consider the needs of your audience.

Read God’s Word

Internalize the verse and hold your Bible while reading it to your audience. Consider having an audience member read it for you (make sure you ask them in advance!) When introducing the passage, state your reference at least twice at the beginning and then again afterward. One goal should be that your audience will meditate on the verse on their own.

One mistake the beginner storytellers make is to improvise an ending. What a shame it is when a story falls flat due to an under-prepared application. Try writing out your conclusion and even a closing prayer.

**QUOTES ABOUT STORYTELLING**

“It is significant that God does not present us with salvation in the form of an abstract truth, or a precise definition or a catchy slogan, but as story...Story is an invitation to participate, first through our imagination and then, if we will, by faith, with our total lives in response to God.”

- Eugene Peterson

“Human beings are innately social creatures, and stories are the single most powerful glue that binds us together. One definition of a community is people who share common stories. People know who they are and who they belong to by the stories that they tell together.”

- Daniel Taylor

“After we tell God’s story, it tells us, and then we have a new story to tell. The stories shape the community, and the community responds with new stories. But both the telling and the hearing have the power to transform”

- Lillian Daniels