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My journey into story and what I've discovered along the way.

This morning I'd like to make LCJE history and actually speak on my topic. This may throw some of you off but I trust you'll be able to handle it.

My journey, this seems to be the hip way to talk about what you've learned over the years, begins in Toronto. Sharon and I were working with CPM since my graduation from MBI in 1986. We were assigned to Toronto and made it one year before we moved back to the States. Four years later we returned to Toronto to take over the work started by Albert Israeli. At that time the work consisted mostly of a regular bible study made up of people from the former Soviet Union. Shortly after we arrived Ben Volman went on a hiatus from CPM.

Ben had decided to shut down his congregation as he left and invited me to attend the last meeting in the home of one of the members. The people who were still attending the congregation were disappointed Ben was leaving and the work was being shut down so they all thought it was a good idea to focus their anger on me. So for the next few hours everyone made it clear to me how much they disliked me. Having spent the previous four years doing street evangelism in NYC it was kind of like being back home.

My primary purpose was to let them know we were starting a new congregation called Beth Sar Shalom and they were all invited to attend. Surprisingly a few of them did begin to attend the new congregation.

Over the next several years the small congregation grew to around 80 regular attenders, I would say members but that might be an

overstatement. As the congregation grew we became a very eclectic group, about 70% of the people came from the FSU. The rest were mostly Canadians but many of them, or their parents had come from different nations in Europe, Africa, and the US. The one common factor was we were a mainly Jewish congregation, which certainly didn't limit opinions.

I had always heard the real church, if I could use that term, was a multicultural church. This was a true picture of the kingdom of heaven, people from many nations and tongues. Though this sounded like a great theory, I had not heard many people talk about how to reach your multicultural church.

It was a struggle to preach every week. Not the exegesis, after all I was a Moody grad. But how do I communicate the truth to people from so many countries and cultures? My illustrations were US based, and didn't reflect the background of my people. So began the journey. More hip talk.

How could I be a better communicator to my multicultural group? I started to think about some great biblical communicators and what made them effective. One thing I hadn't thought about before was most of the time people communicate to their own culture. I'm not saying true biblical teaching is limited to one culture, but generally the most effective teachers seemed to be based in a single culture.

I began reading books on preaching and communication. One day I read "Learning To Preach Like Jesus" by Ralph and Greg Lewis. Ralph Lewis was a Professor of Preaching at Asbury Theological Seminary. There was a sentence from that book that struck me. Lewis wrote, "With Jesus the story wasn't to illustrate the point, the story was the point." That statement changed the way I was preaching.

*SIDE NOTE: In the stages of my journey I wrote to some authors who I found to be helpful, including Dr. Lewis. I always found these people to be very kind. In the case of Dr. Lewis he sent me some notes and a copy of*

*another one of his books he thought I might enjoy. Reg Grant was another person, I read his book and called him at Dallas Seminary and we spent a few hours on the phone. I didn't even know he was a big shot. I've even had a few sermons graded by Haddon Robinson.*

I reread the gospels looking with a fresh eye for the stories. There was no question Messiah taught through stories and parables as His main tool. Eventually the idea of using story evolved into the idea of telling first person character based stories to teach Scripture. This is how 2nd Adam, my storytelling ministry, now a part of CJFM, was born in 1994.

The Vision statement of 2nd Adam:

*2nd Adam a non-profit Christian drama ministry, exists to edify believers and evangelize non-believers by bringing the Scriptures to the Jew first as well as to the Gentile, ministering through one-person performances.*

Some people in the Messianic Movement have been a little uncomfortable by my statement saying: *“non-profit Christian drama ministry.”* To those people I say let me assure you that part of the statement was made by my board at the time, three Jewish believers plus me, who insisted on that wording. The final vote was three to one.

Both believers and unbelievers are important to the ministry of 2nd Adam. Storytelling/Drama is a great way to reach everyone: young, old, rich, poor, believers, unbelievers.

### **2nd Adam's Tagline: Teaching the Bible, One Story at a Time**

Let me give an example of the way we might answer a question and then look at how Messiah chose to answer. There is a well known story in the gospels. One day, Messiah was challenged to answer the question: “Who is my neighbor?”

Today we might answer that question in a sermon type format:

- My neighbor lives next door
- My neighbor lives in the next town
- My neighbor lives in the next country

As we make each statement, we feel like we have to prove each one. Why live with pressure like this? Listen to Messiah's response:

30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' 36 Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

Seven sentences! Who in the world doesn't remember this story? It has become a part of our culture. What a great way to teach and learn.

Years ago I was reading a book on story and the Bible. There was a quote from an early Pilgrim. I can't remember the exact quote but it went something like this: "For some unknown reason God has decided to fill the Bible with stories." I have heard different figures but at least 70% of the bible is story. It starts from the very first verse: Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Our God is a storyteller in the best sense of the word. That is one of the ways we are made in the image of God. I have heard many people say it, but I was the first: We are hardwired as human beings to share stories.

A story makes a lesson almost impossible to forget. In our world, as people we communicate through stories. Sometimes people say to me, "Your ministry must be great for children." The truth is its great for adults. No matter how old we get, or how sophisticated we think we are, we all communicate through stories.

What happens when you come into work on Monday morning? Those of you who work anyway. People ask, "How was your weekend?" And what do we do? We tell a story about our weekend. The old picture about hanging around the water cooler is true: it is the place where people share office news, gossip, etc. All through stories.

I recently saw an article in New York Magazine titled: An Easy Way to Get Your Co-workers to Trust You More

"There are pluses and minuses to becoming friends with your co-workers. On the one hand, research has shown that people learn more when they have fun at work, the nine-to-five certainly goes by faster when you have a pal in the office; on the other, workplace friendships can be emotionally exhausting, especially if you're in the weird position of trying to continue that relationship outside the office. But there's a middle ground there, something like friendship lite: Regardless of whether you decide to go the full-blown-buddies route or keep a cordial distance, you still want your co-workers to know you well enough to trust you. And the best way to do that, as writer Renuka Rayasam recently explained for the BBC, isn't showing them that you're reliable or hardworking. In fact, it has very little to do with your competence on the job — more important, she wrote, is that you tell them a personal story or two."

Stories are the key to developing relationships with people. What do people do when they begin dating? They tell stories to one another about friends and family.

Did you ever meet someone and they say: "I've heard so much about you I feel like I know you." It the stories they heard.

Friends are people we share stories with as well as making new stories. I never realized how important the stories we make with our friends are until my friend Bim died. No one else could share our stories. Loss of a spouse, life partner, SO, whatever the heck the term is today. The loss of personal stories you cannot share with anyone else increases the sense of loss.

Let me say one other thing about stories. Stories allow you to get to the end when making a point. How many times have you had a discussion with someone and it was killing them to let you talk because all they wanted to do was interrupt with their point? The result is that its hard to make a point when you are constantly interrupted. A story works differently, all people like a story. And 99% of the time people want to hear the end.

Let me give you an example. How many times have you watched a television show that was not the greatest, but you had to watch until the end to see how it wound up? How many times have you sat in your driveway or garage because you were listening to something on the radio and waited for the end?

One of the advantages of a story based ministry is people listen to the whole story. I have a story about Abraham and Isaac where in the end Isaac realizes he was a picture of the coming Messiah. One Shabbat a Jewish lady came up to me and said, "I liked the beginning, I liked the middle, but I didn't care for the end." I responded, "At least you heard the end."

I have listened to many preachers over the years and even when the most boring are speaking as soon as they say, "One day as I was walking along," everyone looks up to hear the coming story.

I believe there is no question stories are the most important way to communicate. The question is why do stories work? How do they work? Why did Messiah use this method as His primary teaching tool? What made Messiah such an excellent storyteller? What principles can we learn from Him?

Suppose I tell you to think about the words **PREACH OR LECTURE**. What kind of thoughts come to mind?

Lecture method- preaching usually has a negative connotation: "Don't preach at me."

Now think about the word **STORY**. Is there a different picture when you think of this word? Why?

Think about the difference felt by an unbeliever: whether the person would say what they think or not. What difference might it make in the mind of an unbeliever? Invited to a preaching service....

I want to use the things we discuss to help us become better storytellers AND better witnesses, just like Messiah. These observations are my opinions so therefore they are correct. You may disagree with me, I will not try to prevent your right to be wrong.

Please know the statements I'm going to make are generalizations and some things that may be overstated. Don't get all freaked out and tell me every exception. I'm trying to get you to think through the reasons for Messiah's teaching method.

Let me begin by saying we are made in the image of God, as I mentioned, we're hard wired for story. I believe Messiah made His points about God, the kingdom of heaven, and how we should live almost exclusively through stories.

As you know many rabbis, the well known ones at least, are famous for their stories. Why? I learned this technique in the FSU. The speaker asks the questions and then gives the answer. It keeps things moving in the right direction. Why do they use stories? It is the best way to make a point.

At the risk, and maybe hope, of offending someone, I want to mention a few points about the difference between a lecture , a sermon, and a story as far as a teaching tool.

Let me share a few things I've learned about why stories are an effective way to share and teach.

### **Stories involve the Listener**

When we are telling a story it is an interactive activity. You don't tell a story to yourself, there is a listener.

When Messiah taught with story, the listeners were a part of the process. They were "there" as the story unfolded, they were seeing and hearing the action as it was taking place. This also made the teaching personal without being unwelcome.

Think about the story of the Good Samaritan. The lawyer comes along for the ride. He has no idea where he is going to wind up.

### **Stories allow people to think for themselves**



We need to be careful when we are teaching or sharing to let people think. Many times in our teaching and sharing we do not give the listener the opportunity to think. We tell them what to think instead of asking them to think. The commercial that used to be on television: "When I want my girls opinion I give it to them." This is not so uncommon. Just because we have finished the process doesn't mean those listening to us don't have to think it through for themselves. Telling a story allows the listener time to think it through with you.

Again, in the Good Samaritan, it is the lawyer who has to make the decision of who his neighbor is. He's not given the answer.

### **Stories respect the listener**

There is a tendency when we are telling people our point of view to have less respect for the intelligence of the listeners. We are afraid if we do not give the right conclusion to our hearers, they might not arrive there themselves. We know that given the facts, we have come to the correct solution, but our listeners might need more guidance.

A story shows we have enough respect for those listening to believe they will "get it." There may be an element of risk in this. However a well crafted story will allow a listener to come to the correct conclusion. In the Good Samaritan the answer is so painfully obvious the lawyer (as well as the other hearers) land in the right place.

### **Stories make is easy to hear what is being said**

How do you react when someone is lecturing you? It is very easy to think: "Hey, I have no desire to hear this." You know what it is like to lecture a kid who is late, or who brought home a bad report card. They sit there and think: "When will this end?" No one really pays attention to this approach.

On the other hand, a story is easy to listen to. Even if the point is not what we want to hear, it can be told in a way that we can't help listening, we listen in spite of ourselves.

We don't want people to just sit and listen, but we want them to hear. In our world, you almost have to "trap" people into hearing the message because there are so many preconceptions.

### **Stories allow people to convince themselves**

In many conversations today the underlying attitude is "Let me convince you." People, by their very sinful nature, object to being convinced. Stories disarm people's defenses. Then they convince themselves. I am certain this is the only way real change can take place. People must convince themselves of the messages they hear. They will not allow others to convince them, and if it appears to be the case, it is only temporary. With spiritual issues the real change comes through the Holy Spirit.

This method is the best way to give the Holy Spirit room to do His job. We give Him the freedom to work in a person's heart. He knows them better than we do, and He knows the best way to apply the truth we are sharing.

I know someone who tries to persuade everyone he talks to with an onslaught of words. My friend and I laugh about his "Ministry of Convincement", because in the end, no one is convinced.

### **Stories are easy to remember**

When people preach/lecture at (to) us, it is very easy to forget what we hear. On the other hand, a story is easy to remember. Stories stick in our brain. They allow a 'handle' to be placed on the truth. When I was leading my congregation in Toronto, I discovered using a story for my sermon cut

down on my counseling time. Something I never liked any way. As I mentioned earlier I would do all my exegesis and then create a modern day parable. It allowed people to have that handle to pull out the truth for the time they needed it which might not have been that particular Shabbat. The downside was since they remembered the stories they would bring them up to me when I was having a difficulty.

Here's a test to show how memorable stories are. Name some story Messiah told. How many years ago were these told?

Now, tell me a message you heard two months ago. How about two weeks ago? People remember a story forever.

### **Stories are for those Inside and Outside our Community**

Most of the time we only speak to people who are already in our community. We all know the saying: "He was preaching to the converted." No offense for using the word converted. Stories bridge the gap between us and them, no matter who the us and them are.

When Messiah was telling His stories, all types of people wanted to come and hear. Both friends and enemies were looking for a seat in the grass. Look at Luke 15:1: Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. This was the kind of ministry I wanted at the congregation. Usually congregations are thinking of ways to bring people in. In this verse Luke says people were coming to hear Him.

If we are telling stories, we should be reaching all kinds of people. Not only those who are on our side. I realize this is a very general statement but it worked for Messiah.

## **Stories show concern for People**

Does our teaching make people feel like we are doing the judging instead of God? Preaching to people sometimes can only show judgment, while teaching through story shows concern.

We should want people to be comfortable as they listen to what we have to say until it is time for them to become disturbed. Like when they realize the story is about them. If people feel uncomfortable through a story the reason should be because of what the story is saying, not because of the way we are saying it. Don't we want the people who come to hear us or that we share with to be comfortable enough with the message to listen to what is being said?

Let me summarize with three pithy statements about stories:

Stories are a great way to give Information

Stories are the best way to build Relationships

Stories are the bridge to further Communication

## **Storytelling Books**

Improving Your Storytelling

Doug Lipman

Telling Tales to Touch the Heart

Reg Grant & John Reed

Learning to Preach Like Jesus

Ralph Lewis & Gregg Lewis

It's All in How you tell it

Haddon Robinson & Torrey Robinson