

# Tips for effective storytelling

Some people are born storytellers. From the age of five or six, they can recount their accidents or adventures with all the zeal and energy of an actor. Their facial expression and body movements become part of the story. As listeners, we become captivated and involved. Good storytellers invite us to be part of an experience, simply by listening.

Jesus was a wonderful storyteller. Look at the illustrations he used from daily life and his daily interactions with others. He made faith and the kingdom of God relevant for everyone, no matter what their age, their occupations, or social standing. We seen him with Zacchaeus the tax collector, with the Samaritan woman getting her water at the well, with the rich young man, with a room full of people when the ceiling falls in and a paralyzed man is placed in front of him. Of course, more than anything, Jesus was the message. Francis of Assisi often said, “Jesus Preach the gospel, preach the gospel at all times – and if you have to, use words.” Jesus was the good news for many around him. He is the good from our own life, from the newspaper, and from films to bring alive that very good news –the story of Jesus- to our young people.

As you sort through your memory of stories, as you develop your stories about your own encounters with Lord, and prepare to share them with young people, here are some storytelling suggestions:

- Know the point(s) you want to make. Perhaps write them down on a note card. The notes will help you, though a person rarely tells the same story twice in exactly the same fashion.
- The story should come from your heart, or from your life. Allow the spirit to work within you.
- Practice telling your story and the entire talk from beginning to end in front of someone else. Time it and get feedback. Too fast, too slow, unclear. Body language?
- Know your audience: attention span, ages, regional particularities.
- Write down and memorize transition sentences. You may need transitional sentences from the introduction to the body of the talk, and from the body to the conclusion. Memorize the entire talk if possible.
- Ask yourself if the line of thought is clear and easy to follow.
- Be creative – use props, read from a children’s story (Barrington Bunny, Beatrix Potter, Cinderella), or use clips from videos to attract attention or make a point. Use images that listeners have stored in their memories.
- Be yourself. Your audience will know if you are forcing energy or enthusiasm. If you normally talk with your hands, continue to do so.
- Try to relax. You are sharing yourself, your faith, and Jesus with others. You have a gift to offer.

- Interruptions or a chatty group? Ask them to hang with you a minute or two, let them know that those that want to hear are unable to focus, because of the distraction. A last ditch effort is to gently and firmly invite those disrupting the groups to leave the room and return when they feel like they are ready.
- Be aware of any non-verbal messages you may be sending such as pacing, writing a piece of paper in your hands, facial expressions. It is said that 98% of communication is non-verbal-no wonder we rarely understand each other!
- Be aware of your voice: intonation, inflection, emphasis. How many homilies have we all tuned out because it was delivered in a monotone. No matter how good your story or the message you want to share, it must be relevant to the culture of young people and your presence must convey that you are happy to be there and that you have something interesting to share.
- Ask someone to pray for you while you speak. Ask the Lord to speak through you, that you might be a vessel or channel for what he wants the group to hear.
- Pray for open hearts and minds within the group.

The more frequently you speak, the easier it becomes to feel comfortable, to engage an audience, to feel natural sharing your journey and bringing the gospel alive. Yet many a well-planned program has flopped, and so have many well-planned stories. Practice several times, pray, and remember that the rest is out of your hands. Through baptism, we are called to share the good news of Jesus with others. Go forth and give it a try through stories!