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A Personal Word5

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Chapter One

A NEW WORLD AND ITS STORY

It was a drizzly Sunday morning and Brenda was getting ready for church. Her husband, Mark, needed to stay home and take care of their two sons who were sick. He helped Brenda get the two girls into the car, kissed them all goodbye, and waved as they drove off.

When the trio arrived at church, Brenda delivered Amelia to the nursery and escorted Joyce to children's church. She planted herself in the auditorium, knowing she could enjoy the pastor's sermon without being distracted with restless children.

Brenda enjoyed the way her pastor preached with love and compassion. It was obvious he put a lot of preparation into his sermons, so she always took notes.

When the service ended, she gathered the two girls and headed home where the men of the family were waiting. Once inside the house, Mark asked how the service was.

"Great!" She then told him about the choir rehearsal after the service, and how she practiced her solo in preparation for the next Sunday.

“What was the sermon about?”

“Oh, um . . . well . . . it was really good.” She tried to recall some of the details of the sermon, but couldn’t remember a thing. She concluded that all the activity after the service caused her memory to lapse. Finally, she shuffled through her Bible and found the notes she had taken.

“Let’s see . . .” her voice trailing off as she skimmed her notes. “Ah, yes. That’s right. He’s continuing his series through the gospel of Luke. It was really good.”

From behind her, Joyce said, “I remember what Mr. Campbell spoke about in children’s church.” With that, the child went into enthusiastic detail about all her teacher had taught in the children’s service. Not only did she remember the entire lesson, she was able to relate it in a way that made her parents wish they had been able to hear such an exciting presentation.

Did the daughter remember the sermon because she is younger and has a better memory? Not at all. While preparing his lesson, Mr. Campbell was aware of how his audience receives and remembers information.

What Mr. Campbell did should be done whenever a presentation is prepared for any group, including adults. There are two types of adults who respond especially well to stories. They are 1) *story thinkers* and (2) *men*. Knowing how each of these groups receives and remembers information will help you to adapt your presentation with them in mind.

ADAPTING PRESENTATIONS FOR STORY THINKERS

Our culture has gone through a change that has altered our society. Many Christian ministries are becoming aware of it, but don’t know how to respond. Other ministries have labeled it ungodly, so they ignore it and continue on as if nothing had changed.

This cultural change is neither godly or ungodly. It is simply the difference in how people receive information and the way they remember information. People of past generations were considered analytical thinkers. For them, everything is linear. They think in facts and figures, and the best way to communicate to them is through an outline.

If speakers want analytical thinkers to remember information for any length of time, they create points and put them in a creative order. For instance, they can have all the words of the outline start with the same letter. Better yet, the first letter of all the points can spell out a word. They don't feel the need to include a story, unless it reinforces the outline. Stories are props that illustrate the points, so they are no longer called stories. They are called illustrations.

This was excellent preparation for past generations, but everything has now changed. Most people today receive information best if it is given to them in the form of stories. They are not linear thinkers but are what I call story thinkers.

These people are some of the most creative, productive citizens of our society. They want the information, and they want it straight in a way that holds their interest. You still need a theme and even an outline; just don't let them know you have it. They don't want your clever tricks and ingenious alliterations. Stories are the best way to reach this new breed of thinker.

TIME TO ADJUST

I was invited to a school several years ago to teach creative writing to their students. The principal was concerned about my going into one particular fourth grade class. The teacher had tried everything but was frustrated. The principal told me, "The class is full of ADHD students. You are going to have problems there, so I better go with you in case you need my help."

He sat in the back as I taught the class. He was amazed. I was using storytelling to teach the students to create, write, and re-write. He watched as these students listened in rapt attention. He was astonished at how I kept the room in a constant state of chaos. Yet every student was learning and creating. They walked around the room, sat on the floor, talked to one another, participated in fun activities, and created fantastic compositions. This classroom was full of story-thinking students, and I was successful because I adjusted to their way of thinking. It may have seemed chaotic to an outsider, but it was organized and completely under my control.

I teach adult Bible studies the same way, with the same results. People are encouraged to move around, talk to one another, express ideas, and be creative. No one knows exactly what to expect when they walk into class, but they know it is going to be fun and they will learn the Scriptures. Members of the class tell me they understand their Bible better and they are growing in their walk with God.

We have taken this process into prisons and have watched it change lives. Inmates respond enthusiastically, and soon their entire worldview is changed. It is hard to maintain their reputation as a troublemaker when they are out in the yard telling Bible stories. Some wardens have told us it changes not only the prisoners but also the atmosphere of the entire prison. It is exciting when inmates learn this method and use it to teach the Bible to others.

THE SCRIPTURES CONTAIN BOTH

Jesus stood before Galileans and looked into their faces. He had a message and wanted them to listen and remember what He said. He told them stories. It is said Jesus was the master teacher because of His use of stories. No, He was the master teacher because He knew His audience and adapted His message to their way of thinking.

Paul stood before Greeks and looked into their faces. He had a message and wanted them to listen and remember what he said. He used analytical reasoning to explain the gospel. He knew his audience and adapted his presentation.

Later, when Paul went to Jerusalem, he neglected to adapt his presentation for the Jewish audience; instead he used the analytical method that worked so well with his Gentile audience. But the people standing before him were unmoved by his message. Only the Romans listened to him.

Don't make this mistake. Know your audience! Always present your message in a way that is consistent with how they think.

The Bible reflects the different ways people receive and remember information. The various writers of Scripture wrote to either story thinkers or analytical thinkers. The Gospels are written in stories. To this day, they appeal to the story thinkers in our society. The Epistles are analytical and appeal to that type of thinker. Both need to be read and studied, but the appeal is different.

STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES

It is no longer acceptable to add an illustration near the end of a lesson, sermon, or business presentation. The techniques you will find in this book will give you the ability to skillfully adjust your message so you can talk the language of the people around you. Today your audience thinks in stories, they remember stories, and they will listen if you tell stories.

A few years ago, a woman told me she was scheduled to speak to a particular organization, but was allowed only seven minutes to make her presentation. "How can I give my three important points and still have time to tell a story?"

She was still thinking "linear" and wanted to add an illustration

to her points. I showed her how to reverse that thinking. She was then able to create a seven-minute story that contained all three concepts she wanted to communicate. The key was to emphasize the story and not the points. I told her, "If you are brave enough to do this, your talk will be the most dramatic seven minutes of the day, and the audience will never forget it."

ADAPTING YOUR PRESENTATION FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Men and women generally receive information differently. Men tend to think in pictures, while women tend to think in words.

I was in a meeting of businesspeople attended mostly by men. A woman came to talk about her business and how it related to our community. She spent the entire time telling us facts. She was giving us words not pictures. The men in the room might have stayed at the meeting out of courtesy, but every one of them left the room mentally. Each one was thinking about things unrelated to what she was talking about.

I knew she had fantastic stories about her business that would have completely captivated this group, but she just wasn't using them. Since we were friends, I waited a few days and then made an appointment with her. I asked how she felt the meeting went. She knew it had not gone well but was puzzled as to why.

I explained about the different thinking processes of men and women. I led her through a process where she put her points inside relevant stories. We worked on this together until we had created a presentation about herself, her clients, and the impact her business was making. It transformed how she has been received in the business community. She is able to tell all the facts, but they are hidden in interesting stories. Now her audiences pay attention to what she says.

MAKING A PRESENTATION?

- *In one phrase, state what you hope to accomplish with your presentation.*
 - *Give three or four important aspects about the subject matter.*
 - *Craft several two-minute stories that illustrate each aspect. The number of stories is determined by the length of your presentation.*
 - *Weave these stories together to make a formal presentation.*
- * Use the instruction in this book to increase how effectively you deliver this presentation.*

REACHING LISTENERS WITH STORIES

People approached this book for different reasons. Some want to create stories designed to enhance business presentations or influence clients. Others specialize in children's stories for a Sunday school class or children's church. Perhaps you sense a need to put a new spark into family devotions and capture the hearts of your children. Pastors may be reading this book because they want to become more creative in the way they prepare and present sermons.

Whatever the reason, we are all called to work with both analytical and story thinkers. We are to communicate to both men and women. As you keep reading, you will learn to prepare a story and present it in a way that leaves a lasting impression. You will increase the impact you will have on a wide variety of people, some you may not have been able to reach until now.

EASY—HARD

Connecting with story thinkers is easy compared to communicating with analytical thinkers. It will seem harder if you are already active in public speaking. That is because it is different from how

you were trained. Look at it this way. Your training causes you to focus on a generation that is decreasing in numbers.

As you read this book, practice each step, and do the exercises. It will show you how to communicate in a way your audience will hear and remember. Men and boys will listen with a higher level of attention. But more important, you will be able to reach out to a society that is desperate for your message.

Oh, to make things simple, I am going to refer to you as “a storyteller.” This doesn’t mean I think you are a professional storyteller. It simply means you are one who plans to communicate to our “story-thinking culture” through the use of stories.

Before, people heard you speak.

Now they will understand what you are saying.