

The background of the cover is a dark, starry night sky. A bright, glowing moon is positioned in the upper right quadrant. In the lower right, a campfire burns brightly, with flames and sparks rising into the air. The overall mood is serene and evocative.

the art of *storytelling*



EASY STEPS TO PRESENTING AN UNFORGETTABLE STORY

JOHN WALSH

Chapter Three

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LET THEM WALK IN YOUR SHOES

I didn't know, until she told me, that Noah almost forgot to take the bucket on the

trip. That would have been a miserable trip.

The flickering fireplace looked so inviting, displaying colorful hues of orange and yellow. I leaned back in my easy chair, listening to the crackle and hiss of burning wood and enjoying the faint smell of smoke. It added warmth to a

cold winter evening and offered comfort at the end of a hectic day.

A good story would be the perfect complement to this cozy

setting. I was in the mood for one that came from the Old Testament, so I picked up the Bible and turned on the side lamp. The page fell open to 2 Kings 4. My eyes skimmed to verses 38–41, which had the heading, “Elisha heals the noxious pottage.”

I read the passage several times to make sure I understood what was recorded about this incident. I wondered if it were part of a greater series of events, so I read the few chapters that came before. They added little additional light on what happened. The account stood by itself.

Although I had no intention of telling this in front of an audience, I took the story to step two without a second thought. I wanted to gain a better understanding of what might have happened that day. In fact, in my mind I walked through all the steps in this chapter.

When I finished reading, I turned off the lamp and looked into the flickering fire, watching the story unfold before my eyes. The prophet Elisha and his small group of men camped in the mountain region of Gilgal. Several of them had gone out to gather provisions for a meal. I walked with a young man who found some gourds that were poisonous. Without asking, he went back to the fire, took out his knife, and shredded them into the stew.

I was there. It was convenient that my fire was a lot like theirs. The drama unfolded before me: the pot of stew on the open fire, the poison that contaminated the precious food, and the miracle of the servant of God.

Now we'll discover how to bring a story like this one to life. The added benefit of all this story development is that you just may find a fresh way to enliven your private devotions.



STEP 2: *Pushing Through the Story*

This step is simple but critical. Once you have read the story several times, put the book away and talk through it. Tell it to another person—or merely tell it to a chair, bookshelf, or another object in the room. The important part is to talk completely through the story. You are not performing at this point, but simply telling what you know about it.

I prefer telling the story to someone. My wife is usually kind enough to listen as I go through this process. Recently my grown son has been stopping by for this purpose. We call it our “exchange program.” I listen to his story, and he listens to mine.

Pushing through a story does several things.

- It takes the story off the written page and puts it into a *telling* form. This is an informal telling of the story, and you don't have it memorized, so don't worry about getting all the details correct at this point.

- It helps you see if you have all the *important* facts straight in your memory. While you don't need to remember all the details, the structure does need to be in place.
- It gives you a chance to see if you enjoy telling the story. Simply reading it does not provide you this gauge. Sometimes I like reading a story, but it goes flat once I tell it. Other times a story will seem dull when I read it, but it comes alive when I tell it.

Storytelling is an art form best developed in front of people. Telling a story is the only time you can get a true feel of its quality. It allows you an opportunity to hear yourself as you tell it.

PUTTING THE CLAY ON THE WHEEL

I compare this step to putting potter's clay onto the wheel. Before the potter can create a sculptured piece of art, he must remove the clay from its bucket and put it onto the table or wheel.

By pushing through a story, you are taking a written narrative and putting it into your mind. It is raw and undeveloped, but it has potential. To simply think about the story without telling it is like looking at the clay in the bucket. It just doesn't get the job done. Take the story out of the bucket, push through it, and listen to yourself tell it.

time to practice



- * Read Genesis 8:6–13 two or three times, and then close your Bible and talk through it. Make it simple, yet as detailed as possible without rereading the story. After you have completed this step, read the story one more time.

A Group Exercise

- * Allow each person time to read Genesis 8:6–13.
- * Ask for a volunteer to stand and push through the story for the group.
- * Allow others to add more details to the story that the volunteer may have left out.

time to practice



- * Now let's work on the story you have selected. Read it several times and once you are ready, put it aside and push through it.

A Group Exercise

- * Divide the class into groups of two and designate which person is number 1 and which is number 2.
- * It is important that the 1s and 2s are working on different stories.
- * Allow the 1s two minutes to tell their story to the 2s.
- * At the end of two minutes, reverse roles.
- * The job of a listener is to look at the person telling the story *and* appear interested with nods and sounds.

MOVE AWAY FROM THE BOOK

You'll do this first telling with no prompting or external support. Once you have pushed through a story, and reread it one or two more, you should not look back at the book.

If you are unsure of the structure of the plot, you may find you have to read the text several more times. If so, restart the entire process. Once you are ready, push through the story again; this time, don't look back. You will reread the story at a later time. For now, it is important to move away from the written format and begin shaping the spoken format.

the art of storytelling will change
the way you tell stories!

Some people are great storytellers, while others cringe at the thought of speaking before a group of people. Yet, as John Walsh says,

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We all have the gift of storytelling.

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Whatever your ability, this book is



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