

The Good Story Project

by Bill Frisby and Dave Rippey



Bill Frisby



Dave Rippey

Several years ago an evangelistic team with Operation Mobilization was distributing literature and speaking with people in a village in Lebanon. As they shared the gospel with a group of people, a restaurant owner was listening from a distance. When the crowd subsided, he invited the team to have lunch with him in his home. They accepted and enjoyed a wonderful meal. After eating, the man went to a bookcase and took a small pamphlet off the shelf. He said, “Twenty-two years ago, when I was 12 years old, another group came to this village. They told me about a man named Jesus and gave me this paper. I’ve been waiting all these years for someone to come back to tell me more about Him.” The team shared the hope they have in the Lord Jesus Christ and led this man to faith in Christ. Then someone looked at the back of the pamphlet where they saw a stamp which said, “Operation Mobilization.”

This true story needs no explanation. It compels us!

Stories, a readily available ministry resource, are one of the oldest and most powerful forms of communication. God has given each of us the raw material of our experience as believers—experience that, when rendered into well-crafted and well-told stories, can encourage, bless and call people to action. Good stories help advance the Kingdom and convey ministry impact!

Why are good stories an effective ministry tool? Good stories are excellent vehicles to communicate truth. The Bible is a collection of stories (approximately 75 percent)—from which each generation draws wisdom, inspiration, and fresh insight. Jesus told brief stories all the time (see Matthew 13).

Chuck Colson once said, “Think of the effective use Jesus made of images and stories. He could have simply said, ‘Take care of people who are hurt and victimized.’ Instead, He spun the tale of the Good Samaritan. He could have just said, ‘God forgives your sins, so forgive others.’ Instead, He told the parable of the unmerciful servant. Why? Because a

.....
“Good stories help advance the Kingdom and convey ministry impact.”
.....

story gets at aspects of truth that are beyond the power of didactic teaching [lecture-style teaching].”

Good stories effectively communicate what God has done. In Acts 14:27-15:12, Paul and Barnabas told the Antioch church stories of “what God had done!” In Acts 11, Peter, in his defense of going to the Gentiles, simply told a story about “what God had done” with Cornelius.

People learn from, remember, and re-tell good stories. Stories are at the heart of one’s knowledge and understanding of God, the world, and oneself. Stories weave the events of individuals’ lives into a larger narrative, helping join people in a common purpose and meaning.

Good stories link the legacy of the past with present realities, and hopes for the future in ways that allow people to see the value of the ministry and their work. Stories help people decide if they should join with you in the journey and be part of the narrative themselves.

Everyone is touched by good stories. Young and old, educated and non-educated, men and women—*people from every culture, language, and country embrace, accept and respond to good stories.*

What are the most effective types of ministry stories? There are at least five broad categories that people in ministry find useful:

1. Giving stories help people see themselves as a vital part of your ministry. They place the giver into the ministry as an active participant—as someone who benefits from as well gives to the organization. The power of these stories is in their acknowledgement of the basic human need to give and to be recognized for giving.

2. Cultural stories provide context and enrich your message. The best cultural stories take the audience into another world. They vividly describe what you saw, heard, touched, smelled, or felt in your heart. The more of the five senses you draw on, the more vivid the message. A good cultural story does not demean another culture but instead shows an interesting, different or compelling side of it—customs, relationships, and attitudes.

3. Spiritual-need stories capture the hopelessness of people apart from Jesus Christ. Such a story could be someone’s testimony leading up to the point of conversion, but stopping at the lowest point. The most powerful spiritual-need stories poignantly

dramatize the need for Jesus, and show how your organization provides a meaningful response to that need.

4. Vision stories inspire people to walk with you into the future, even if it means risk and sacrifice. Good vision stories help people see and desire to be part of the story going forward.

5. End result or “What God has done” stories dramatize the results of your ministry through examples of what God has done. There are endless possibilities for “What God Has Done” stories.

How do I select the right story? Story selection should be guided by three considerations.

- **Purpose**—What purpose will be served by using a story? What is the message of the story?
- **Audience**—Who are my listeners? Do they care about the theme of the story? How do I address them?
- **Impact**—Is the story vivid? Is it credible and relevant to my message? Will it have the desired

“The most powerful spiritual-need stories poignantly dramatize the need for Jesus.”

impact (e.g., foster deeper understanding; inspire action)?

How do I tell a good story? The key to telling a good story can be found in the acronym **S-T-O-R-Y**, as shown below:

- It starts with a **Specific Incident**
- It gets **To The Point**
- It has **One Good Ending Line**
- It’s the **Right Length**
- It has **Your Details**

Let’s look at each of these more closely.

- A good story is focused on one **specific incident**. It’s like a

What Are the Qualities of Good Ministry Stories?

Dan Seidman, CEO of Got Influence?, says, “Good stories are personal, emotional, and teachvvvble.”

- **Personal.** Good stories come from personal experiences and the energy they create—the strength of impressions and lessons learned. They make hearers feel they’ve “been there.”
- **Emotional.** In good stories, hearers can often see themselves in the story, and will identify closely with the narrative at an emotional level. Good stories have elements of mystery, drama, and novelty—a mix of both the strange and the familiar.
- **Teachable.** Good stories prompt the hearer to see, think, or act differently. They offer a lesson that inspires positive or beneficial action (to reflect on events, to contribute to a cause, to serve).

snapshot, a photograph. Focus in on the specific incident. Leave out all non-essential information.

- A good story has a good beginning—it **gets to the point** quickly. Start by answering the questions, **when – where – who** directly and succinctly, without blurring the focus of the story. Don’t tell the audience you are going to tell them a story. They will know soon enough.
- A good story has **one good ending line** that is memorable, provocative and personal. Don’t explain the story (the story should explain itself) or be tempted to pack too many lessons into one story; this only diffuses its impact.
- A good story is the **right length**. As a general rule, the best ministry stories are brief, between 30 seconds to two minutes maximum.

- A good story has **your details**. Your personal touches—your choice of words, your emphases, your speaking style—this brings color to the canvas as you paint a picture with words.

Stories are powerful! The good news about storytelling is that storytelling skills can be learned, developed and improved with practice. Start today, gathering good stories and practicing how to tell them effectively. Soon you will have new stories to tell of “What God Has Done” in your ministry! 🙏

Bill Frisby is CEO/Founder of Strengthening Leaders L3C and Dave Rippey is their Senior Partner.

ECFA's Good Story Project

ECFA has launched The Good Story Project—ECFA.org/Story. We are collecting dynamic stories about the good work being accomplished by nonprofits accredited by ECFA. In turn, we will share these stories on our website and in printed materials to help get out the word of the Kingdom work being accomplished. “Look what God did!” We are primarily trying to convey what God has been v in lives, through faithfulness to His calling. A good story is about what happens when God meets an individual in a life changing way. Take a moment to share stories of your organization as told in blogs, on your website, in brochures and more. It will be a blessing to others! 🙏

Reprinted from
FOCUS on Accountability
ECFA

440 West Jubal Early Drive, Suite 130 • Winchester, VA 22601
800-323-9473 • ECFA.org