

PARABLES AND FABLES THEIR VALUE AND HOW TO USE THEM.

VALUE OF PARABLES AND FABLES

They have a universal value

The “**Spoken**” language is culturally conditioned. The “**Symbolic language of parables and fables**” is not. Parables and fables cut across cultural frontiers. With the passage of time the spoken language in which a parable originally was culled, may change, but the message of the parable remains unchanged. They have a lasting and a universal meaning value.

There is a similarity between parables and fables to algebraic formulae. In algebra, the factors or quantities expressed by letters like a,b,d, or x,y, z, may change, but the value of the formulae remains. In the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, for instance the individuals mentioned - The Publican and the Pharisee - do not stand as individual persons linked to a particular culture, or historical period, but as prototypes obtaining through space and time in the history of man.

Timeless

Parables are relevant always and for all time. They touch upon and evoke something primordial and fundamental in man. They are ever old and ever new. They speak to man in the depths of his being,

Symbolical

Parables and fables share in the nature of symbols. They are not tied to verbal discourses. They are a kind of "non-verbal" communication. Parables and fables can be communicated wordlessly. They can be expressed through mime, acting, drawing, song or dance.

Parables and fables address themselves to all men, the literate and the illiterate, the learned and the ignorant, the trendy and the old-fashioned. However, they reveal their meaning more readily to those not spoiled by "culture", “sophistication” and "civilization".

Parables speak with an idiom far more direct, incisive and eloquent than ordinary discourse. They have a translucence that defies the opacity of words.

Subversive

Parables challenge the existing order, our social structures and value systems. They smash our idols. They debunk the hypocritical self-complacency of our everyday lives, the conventions by which we rationalize our social pretensions. They open our eyes to the distortions of our "social order" caused by injustice, oppression and exploitation on the one hand and a glaring lack of social concern and engagement on the other.

Provocative

Parables and fables prod and provoke, challenge and chasten, awaken and activate. They force the listener to react, to reinterpret and reevaluate his behavior, thought and emotional patterns. They shock him into reform and renewal. They rouse him from his self-delusions and easy anomie.

Sounding Board

Parables and fables compel their listeners to meaningfully relate to the stories they are told by holding up a mirror to their lives. Through these stories they see themselves for what they are and not what they pretend to be. Parables and fables are sounding boards with the help of which the inner attitudes of the listeners come to the surface and they are enabled to locate the vision of reality that should shape their lives. The reactions to the parable stories show whether each person is making an honest attempt to face reality boldly or is trying to cover it up with a curtain of illusion.

Prophetic and Proclamatory

They "proclaim" what should be, for man, against what it is. They urge a change of heart as a basic condition for the radical transformation of one's life. They reveal the inmost depths of the person where God, who is love and the ultimate answer to all human conflicts, is to be found.

They disclose God's final fidelity to those who sincerely strive to know and do his will even when they know nothing of what it means for them or where it will lead them.

While using parables keep in mind these golden rules

Parables and fables are meant for

1. Imparting a *minimum of knowledge*.
2. And a *maximum of insights*.
3. *Heightening awareness: if. f.i.*
 - i. Self-awareness.
 - ii. Awareness of one's lack of commitment.
 - iii. Awareness of an unjust situation.
4. *Evoking a wide spectrum of emotions*.
5. *Generating drastic behavioral change*.
6. *Leading people to action*.
7. *Challenging entrenched but wrong values*.
8. *Questioning our worshipping the "status quo"*.
9. *Shaking up the self-complacent*.

PARABLES AND FABLES

HOW TO USE THEM FOR SUNDRY

EVENTS

General principle

- ✓ Parables and fables are not "gap-fillers" or "time-killers". They are not meant to entertain people or dangle some attractive distractions before our audiences.
- ✓ They are meant to be "starters" or "triggers" to provoke the audience to act, react and interact. They are only the beginning of a process of reflection, sharing, discussion and learning.

Hints how to use Parables and Fables

- ✓ Be quick to pick up the reactions of your group and of each member in particular.
- ✓ Be very alert and sensitive to the emotional vibrations and moods of your audience. .
- ✓ Tune in to the "wave lengths" of your listeners and accept them as they are.
- ✓ Start from where they are and then lead them on as far as they can go in the direction of what they should be. Keep going along with them. Do not force the pace of change.

Before the Presentation

- ✓ Prepare your audience by creating a suitable mood of seriousness and willingness to cooperate.
- ✓ Inform them that a parable will be presented to them with a view to a serious discussion to follow.
- ✓ Help the audience to take in the parable in an attentive and relaxed mood.
- ✓ Insist on strict silence before and during the presentation.
Request the participants to keep comments for a later occasion.
- ✓ Don't announce the title of the parable or describe its contents or disclose its theme beforehand.

Presentation

When you use a parable or a fable as starter or trigger for an event, present the parable in the most impressive way available to you. We suggest below, 13 different styles of presentation: Choose any most helpful for the occasion.

1. Read the parable or fable to the audience.
2. Distribute printed or Xerox copies of the parable and request the Participants to read it very carefully.
3. Narrate the parable yourself or get a good story-teller to retell it.
4. Get the participants to read it in dialogue form.
5. Have it mimed.
6. Have it acted in a drama or skit form.
7. Use of puppetry..
8. Radio-play technique. Prepare a soundtrack of it and replay it to the audience.
9. Shadow play
10. Photo language. - Pictures or photo story technique.
11. Poster story. Ask the participants to prepare beforehand posters and/or collages forcefully bringing out the gist of the parable.
12. Live tableaux. Keep building an a alive tableaux as the story proceeds.
13. If available, show the audiovisual montage of the Parable or Fable..

After Presentation Pass on to Personal Reflection, Group Sharing and Discussion of the Parable or Fable

TWO METHODS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION, GROUP SHARING-AND GROUP DISCUSSION OF PARABLES AND FABLES.

Choose the one that suits you best.

First method: "Open Sharing" Method

1. Personal Reflection.

Soon after the Parable or Fable has been presented to the audience, invite the participants to reflect on its meaning, the insights they got from it and the feelings they experienced

- Request them to put their thoughts, insights and feelings in writing.

The advantages of putting them in writing are:

- ✓ *All will have something ready to share.*
- ✓ *Those who feel shy to share will feel confident when they have something in hand.*
- ✓ *Once their feelings and thoughts are already written down, they will not be influenced by what they hear from others.*
- Help them by suggesting some general questions, such as:
 - *What did you learn from the parable? Insights, lessons: enumerate and explain.*
 - *What did you feel? How? When? Where?*
 - *What points arising from the parable would you like to discuss? Mention them.*
 - *What applications of the parable can you make to life in general? How? Why?*
 - *What applications of the parable can you make to your personal life? How? Why?*
 - *What can you do about it? What will you do about it?*
 - *Do you agree or disagree with the main idea of parable? How? Why?*

2. Group Sharing

- After they have written their reflections, start the Sharing, one person a time.
- Until the sharing is over, discussions will not be entertained.
- The moderator or someone else will write on the black-board the main ideas coming from the floor

3. Discussion

- When the sharing is over, ask the participants to go over the list of items and ideas recorded on the board and choose the topics they wish to take up for immediate discussion.
- The moderator will moderate the discussion. At this stage he should not give his personal thoughts and opinions. He only facilitates the group discussion.
- He should create an atmosphere of freedom, acceptance and respect for the participants' views and feelings.

4. Input and Teaching

- The moderator will sum up the findings of the group.
- **He** will, candidly add, supplement, correct, even refute whatever he feels of importance.
- His input should be objective, respectful and sound, not "preachy", "moralizing" or "manipulative".

Second Method: "Restricted Sharing"

Introduction

- ✓ In this method the moderator will choose before hand the topic or theme he wants to take for reflection, sharing, discussion and prayer.
- ✓ Unlike the first method described above, the group is not given a chance to express their theme preferences.
- ✓ Since the Moderator in advance, decides the theme for the day, this method may prove easier for him. He will be at ease to prepare whatever materials he needs for the forthcoming session.
- ✓ This method saves time, but it has a drawback: It does not leave the choice of topic to the participants

1. Before the Presentation

- ✓ The moderator will choose the topic he intends to expound at the sessions.
- ✓ The theme should easily flow from the parable or fable itself.
- ✓ The topic chosen should be practical and relevant to the audience.
- ✓ Already before the presentation, the moderator will prepare a short questionnaire based on the story to elicit from the audience, the reactions, ideas and thoughts he would lie to touch upon..

HOW TO FRAME THE QUESTIONNAIRE

THE QUESTIONS SHOULD BE

- Simple, concise and to the point.
- Subtle enough to elicit from the participants the answers wanted for the development and discussion of the selected theme
- Open-ended i.e. not answerable by a simple "yes" or "no", but questions that compel the participants to give personal answers through which they disclose something of themselves..
- Non-prejudicial i.e. neutral questions non judgmental. .
- Stimulating i.e. inciting, provoking the participants to think and reflect.
- Make good use of the following key words: "Why", "How", "When", "Where".

The success of the event deepens much on a well- thought-out and balanced questionnaire.

2`. *Presentation of the Parable*

Select one of the means of presentation suggested above "**Ways of Presentation**"

3. *Time for Personal Reflection.*

- ✓ Hand over copies of your questionnaire to all participants.
- ✓ Give the participants time for personal reflection. Keep the group in a reflective silent mood
- ✓ Request them to keep dwelling both on the main lessons of the parable and on the feelings and insights they got at the time of presentation.
- ✓ Ask them to commit their replies to writing.
- ✓ Don't be in a hurry to start your sharing and discussion.

4. *Group Sharing:*

Request the participants to share their replies to the questionnaire, one at a time question after question.

- ✓ Allow clarifications, no discussion yet.
- ✓ After all finished their sharing, initiate a discussion on their sharings and reflections.

5. *Input . Teaching Time.*

Based on the sharing and reflections of the group and on your own thoughts and experiences give them a mop-u input.

6. Personalization and goal setting.

- ✓ After input session, ask the participants to personally reflect in silence on what has been shared, discussed and taught
- ✓ Three simple questions may be given to them helpful for personalization and goal setting, such as:
 - What insights and awareness I gained today about myself?
Write them down.
 - Is there anything I should change in my life? *Write it down*
 - What means shall I take from today to improve myself?
Write them down?

7. Closing Prayer

Lead the participants through prayer, either individually, in small groups, or all together.

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