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# Learning Lifeline

A LETTER ABOUT LEARNING FROM ESTHER WILKISON

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You wouldn't normally go to a small, backwater town expecting to find the smartest, most influential person who ever lived. Yet, that is where you would have found Jesus. Once He left Nazareth, He collected an unimpressive band of men and women to follow Him while He taught about His Father's kingdom. His knowledge and communication skills allowed Jesus to come out on top every single time the best-trained minds of His day tried to trick, trap, or discredit Him. Yet, Jesus never used His brilliance to wow the crowds with pretentious words. Rather, He demonstrated verbal hospitality—welcoming every listener in through the door of story.

Jesus used stories as His key method to invite His learners on a journey from the known of their world into the unknown of His kingdom. His stories welcomed listeners in on the surface level of the characters, setting, and plot He presented. Those who took time to ponder and question discovered a deep understanding of core truths that they could then apply in other settings.

One story Jesus told was about a woman at home looking for a coin. This story is easy to identify with on many levels. Sometimes we feel lost. Are we so valuable to God that He will come looking for us like He came looking for Adam and Eve? What does it feel like to have God celebrate over us when He finds us? Or we can consider what it would be like to be the one who lost something. What do we find valuable enough to be worth cleaning house for? Who or what are we willing to put in extra work to find? And then there are the neighbors. When was the last time we rejoiced with someone who was rejoicing? Is that easy to do? If not, what makes it hard?

It takes effort to weave stories into everything you teach. Here are some things to consider that may help convince you that using stories is worth your effort.

**Stories move us.** Researcher Paul J. Zac studied stories to find out why “stories can move us to tears, change our attitudes, opinions and behaviors, and even inspire us.” He also wanted to know, “how stories change our brains, often for the better.” He discovered that “stories are an effective way to transmit important information and values from one individual or community to the next. Stories that are personal and emotionally compelling engage more of the brain, and thus are better remembered than simply stating a set of facts.”

If we were computers, we might need to be programmed with facts, but instead, as humans, we are characters in a story. As characters, we have our intellect and our emotions engaged in order for us to make wise decisions. That's why we can't help but tune in to the stories around us. We want to know how others handle what they face and how it turned out for them, so that we can discover ideas on how to handle what we are facing in the story we are living.

**Stories hook our attention.** We want to know what happened next. Paul J. Zac continues, “Any Hollywood writer will tell you that attention is a scarce resource. Movies, TV shows, and books always include “hooks” that make you turn the page, stay on the channel through the commercial, or keep you in a theater seat.”

Beware! We have a defeated enemy who wants us to believe that we are not creative enough to find or think of stories to weave into our teaching. The God who welcomes us to ask for wisdom is also



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the source of all creativity. He has an endless supply of both wisdom and creativity. He's happy to share.

What is something you are hoping to get across to those you influence next week? Do you have a story about how you learned what you will be teaching? Can you think of a story from Scripture, history, or literature that relates to your topic? Imagine a character in a setting that learned what you are teaching (or that failed to learn it). How would learning (or not learning) affect this imaginary character's life? Could you make a story around that? Could your kids help you imagine a story like that?

What stories helped you learn what you know at your deepest level? What are stories you use to drive learning deep into others? I'd love to hear about how stories have shaped you.