

The Teacher and Oral Culture

'But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone,
he expounded all things to his disciples.'

Mark 4:34

'We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises
of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.'

Psalms 78:4

"If you are able to tell a good story, you will put shoes on your children's feet."

Quoted by Eleanor Norris at Apostolic Bible Institute in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Objectives:

- Learner will understand and demonstrate knowledge of why oral storytelling is vitally important across all cultures
- Learner will realize that storytelling is one of the oldest and most effective ways to teach imparting both information and empathy
- Learner will comprehend that oral storytelling is communication and be able to name five of the seven purposes of narrative storytelling
- Learner will understand and demonstrate several storytelling techniques
- Learner will be prepared to effectively add narrative storytelling to their lesson plans in the future
- Learner will be able to effectively demonstrate the oral telling of a bible story with a few simple props

Introduction:

Think of a story you heard as a child – one that you still remember. Maybe you heard an elder tell the story to you and your family as you sat together one night.

Telling stories are as old as the Garden of Eden. Storytelling allows us a way to bring the chaos of living into some sort of order. Every culture has a method for storytelling that is mostly connecting events into a sequence with some sort of moral lesson. “We tell stories to transmit information, share histories and teach important lessons” ¹

A story, when we break it into its most simple form, is simply a connection of cause and effect. We think in storytelling and “make up stories in our heads for every action and conversation. Personal stories and gossip make up about 65% of our conversations.” ²

The early church from the book of Acts shared stories to help each other remember that Jesus had created them as a new people destined to do good works. “Stories bring comfort when God’s people face disappointments and uncertainty.” ³

History of Oral Storytelling

When we look at oral storytelling culture in the past, we can easily see that oral stories connected people to each other and their past experiences. Stories connected people to moral truths and the history of that group of people. Stories demonstrated how groups of people communicated and found their place in the world.⁴

Stories were a great way to relieve stress and made people think they could survive one more day. Isak Dinesen said these words, “All sorrows can be borne if you can put them in a story.” ⁵ So, the ultimate reason for any type of storytelling is to survive as humans. Humans have been telling stories to each other since Adam and Eve told their sons about the Garden of Eden and the angels with the flaming swords at the entrance.

Levels of Learning through Storytelling

Storytelling is basically learning through stories.

Learning from stories happens on three distinct levels:

- 1. We learn from hearing stories.** Examples of this include religious stories, or parables, myths and legends. When we hear eyewitness stories of people surviving earthquakes, wars and terrible prison camps, we enter the experience with them.

¹ Juliani, “Stories Are the Key to Building Empathy.”

² Widrich, Ed, “The Psychological Power of Storytelling.”

³ James Little, Jr, PhD, *More Like Him: The Process of Spiritual Formation*.

⁴ Pamela Rutledge Ph.D., M.B.A., “The Psychological Power of Storytelling.”

⁵ Clark, “Narrative Learning.”

We learn about their experience and therefore, it becomes something new in our brain and heart.

- 2. We learn from telling stories.** When we hear stories, we become the receiver of the story. When we tell the story, we are the actor where we put the events into the correct sequence and add the emotions for our audience.
- 3. We learn from stories by recognizing the narratives of stories that have long-term effects on us as cultures and groups of people.** Stories are authentic human experiences. This would include histories of groups of people, movements and displacement of people throughout time across the globe in addition to battles and vicious fighting for control of land. ⁶

Storytelling is Communicating

Jedd Medefind and Erik Lokkesmoe in their book *The Revolutionary Communicator: Seven Principles Jesus Lived to Impact, Connect, and Lead* have an excellent chapter on storytelling. Here are some of the things to be gleaned:

1. Storytelling is a communication method welcomed and loved across every culture and country.
2. Storytelling was the centerpiece of Jesus' communication.
3. "He did not say anything to them without using a parable" (Mark 4:34, NIV).
4. Stories are enjoyable. They keep people listening.
5. Nothing causes people to want to listen to what we have to say like stories.
6. Stories open doors that facts alone cannot.
7. Show don't tell.
8. Engage all the senses, not only the eyes or ears.
9. Use every tool at your disposal including props, objects, and sounds.
10. Nothing allows a communicator to "take on flesh" like a shared experience. It creates special bonds. Stories connect us as humans and help us to bridge our differences.

Guided Practice: A Wordless Video

Using a projector or larger computer screen, watch this YouTube video – **"Birds on a Wire."**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=outeYe1_su4 ⁷

⁶ Clark.

⁷ Pixar | Short Film "For the Birds".

An alternate activity/story is provided in the Appendix – *The Parable of the Needle* story⁸

If time permits, the instructor could certainly use BOTH stories for this lesson!

1. Ask participants to watch completely through the video one or two times.
2. Assemble the class into groups of twos or threes.
3. Ask participants to tell the story of the birds on the wire to each other.
4. Ask participants to divide the story into parts: beginning, middle and ending, to really focus on the progression of the story.
5. After they have several minutes to tell the story of the birds on the wire to the group, show the video one more time for them to solidify the events and the emotion of the story into their brains.
6. Ask the learners to add details to their stories – making sure to capture all the small emotional parts from each of the events.
7. The main goal with this storytelling practice is to practice telling a story. A simple story has the power to communicate many concepts, feelings and truths to the receiver if told correctly.
8. Perhaps, the groups could finish by asking one person from each group to ‘tell’ the story to the main group.
9. After the storytelling is completed, it is recommended to take a quick break.

Alternate activity located in appendix – *The Parable of the Needle* story.

Review of Storytelling Purposes

Storytelling has distinct purposes, and, in this lesson, we will focus on these purposes.

Narrative Learning:

1. To remember the past by **informing** – history repeats itself unless we learn from history
2. To **argue** a point and a counterpoint – example of lawyers in a courtroom
3. To **persuade** an audience – preachers, teachers, politicians
4. To bring the audience into the **experience of the teller** of the story
5. To **entertain** – maybe the most prevalent purpose in our world today through books, movies, digital entertainment etc.
6. To **mislead or be deceptive** – con men are everywhere as well as slick ads trying to deceive everyone
7. To **mobilize others** for social change – it usually takes a compelling story to initiate and maintain a social movement
8. To **survive as human beings** – our humanity depends on each other through narratives⁹

⁸ Margaret Fowler, “The Needle’s Eye.”

⁹ Clark, “Narrative Learning.”

To illustrate these purposes, we will consider several biblical examples and work to discover their purpose.

Read the Aesop example provided and then do your choice of interaction with the class:
A few ideas or choices would include:

- Read aloud to whole group and ask for the moral without first providing the moral to the group
- Utilize a prop like a bundle of small sticks – could use pencils also
- Using probing questions, ask about the purpose(s) of the story – informative? Argumentative? Persuasion? Experience? Entertainment? Deception? Mobilization? Survival story?
- Could the story have several purposes? If so, what purposes could be identified from this story? Require that the students provide evidence from the story to support their claim of stated purpose.
- How would this story be utilized in a class? What lesson does this story teach?
- Could there be additional purposes that are not mentioned in this lesson?
- Do we have any biblical examples that could be a parallel this example?
- Any other stories that are similar to this story?
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Example:

- [The Aesop for Children](#) – link from website

*The Bundle of Sticks*¹⁰

A certain Father had a family of Sons, who were forever quarreling among themselves. No words he could say did the least good, so he cast about in his mind for some very striking example that should make them see that discord would lead them to misfortune.

One day when the quarreling had been much more violent than usual and each of the Sons was moping in a surly manner, he asked one of them to bring him a bundle of sticks. Then handing the bundle to each of his Sons in turn he told them to try to break it. But although each one tried his best; none was able to do so.

The Father then untied the bundle and gave the sticks to his Sons to break one by one. This they did very easily.

"My Sons," said the Father, "do you not see how certain it is that if you agree with each other and help each other, it will be impossible for your enemies to injure you? But if you are divided among yourselves, you will be no stronger than a single stick in that bundle."

Stop here...

¹⁰ "Library of Congress Aesop Fables."

Moral: In unity is strength.

- Participants will talk as a small, informal group and then report their answer to the larger group.
- Participants will work together as partnerships (in groups of two) across the room
- Participants will work on their own and write the correct answer. The teacher would then call on different participants to provide an answer
- Participants could work together as one, large group to determine the answer by discussion and consensus

(Answers to questions are below.)

1. Genesis 3 – the Garden of Eden, the serpent and Eve. The serpent began telling Eve a story. What was the purpose of his story?
2. II Kings 5:1-5 – Captive servant girl telling Naaman’s wife about how the great prophet Elisha could pray to God and heal Naaman. What was the purpose of the servant girl’s story to Naaman’s wife?
3. Proverbs 5 – the adulterous woman. What is the purpose of this story?
4. Psalm 78 – the history of the children of Israel. What is the purpose of this story?
5. Daniel 3:8-30 – the story of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. What is the purpose of the story?
6. Mark 10:46-52 – Blind Bartimaeus, the beggar, healed outside of Jericho. What is the purpose of the story?

If necessary, ask class participants to look in their Bibles or ask a few to tell the stories from the passages. Then discuss each story and what the purpose or purposes of each of the stories might be.

Answers:

1. To mislead – Serpent was trying to beguile Eve and it worked.
2. It could be either to persuade Naaman’s wife or to bring the audience (Naaman’s wife) into the experience of the teller – the captive servant girl
3. To persuade the reader to not fall into adultery
4. To remember the past by informing and possibly for survival for the Jews in captivity later on.
5. This one is interesting. It could be argued that its purpose is several of the above. Allow the group to productively struggle as they discuss this as this will build their understanding of the purposes of storytelling.

The main take-away here is that participants will understand that purposes of stories can be varied or straight-forward. As long as the purpose of their storytelling is clear in their mind, they will be able to tell a compelling story. If the purpose is not clear to the teller, the purpose will never be clear to the receiver of the story.

One last question before moving on:

What is the purpose of the *Birds on a Wire* story?

Name as many morals, or lessons, we could learn from the story about the birds on the wire.

What is the purpose of the alternative example-*The Parable of the Needle*?

Name as many morals, or lessons, we could learn from the story about the needle.

A 20 or 30-minute break would certainly be recommended here!

Biblical Storytelling Techniques

Gene Edwards, author of *The Silas Diary*, brought out that Barnabas and Paul would often tell the story of their transforming testimony of coming to know the risen Lord as they arrived in a new city as a means of introduction. The men would also tell many, many stories about the risen Christ as part of their discipleship training. People would sit and listen and then ask questions and make comments. The author of this book speculates that they would tell the stories and get the people—many of which were illiterate—to repeat it back word for word. He states, “In general the people living in Antioch... (and this is true throughout Galatia) are illiterate, but that does not mean they are ignorant.”

People learned through:

1. Practical and applicable advice.
2. Keeping to the basics.
3. Repeating.
4. Asking questions.
- 5.

Illiterate but yet they survived and were able to carry on the church without Barnabas and Paul remaining there. “They had proven that poor, illiterate people, without buildings or books—believers meeting in living rooms and without even a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures—could know an indwelling Lord and love that Lord as well as anyone”¹¹ Paul and Barnabas from the book of Acts are great examples for us. From these great men we learn that story telling is valuable in any culture with any level of education.

The appendix has a document with many more bible storytelling techniques if needed.¹²

Biblical Storytelling Practice

With consideration to storytelling communicating important concepts as we teach others, understanding the purposes of telling a story, and comprehension of important techniques

¹¹ Gene Edwards, *The Silas Diary: The Story of an Incredible Adventure That Changed the World*.

¹² “Storytelling Techniques PDF 7-24-13.Pdf.”

of telling a story, we will now reinforce each part with practice of telling a simple bible story.

Here are a few steps to make sure that any bible story will be successfully told:

1. Read the scriptural passage that tells the story from the bible several times. ¹³
2. Makes notes. Allow the Lord to speak to you as you read about the men and women of old that were living out their faith just as we are today.
3. Read the story again – taking care to understand the beginning, the middle and the end of the story and getting the sequence correct.
4. Read the story again – this time paying close attention to the people, the characters, in the story. Were they sad, happy, concerned, stressed, fearful, thankful, or other? How could you work to convey the feelings that the people were having at the time of the story?
5. What simple props (simple everyday objects to illustrate the story) could you use to build the scene or the background of the story? For example, if telling the story of the angelic announcement on the hillside, you could bring a flashlight or a candle to shine just like the star was shining upon the place where baby Jesus had just been born. Another idea would be to add a hat or a scarf to your head as you tell the story. If you were telling the story of Jesus walking along the road to Emmaus, you could use a broomstick as if it were another person walking on the road beside you. You could talk to the broomstick just as you could another person, but your audience would completely be enthralled with your prop. (Remember, that a prop could also be a photo, a person or a simple, everyday object.)
6. In the telling of a Bible story, we want to bring the Bible to life, but we are careful to not add to or take away from the Word of God. Use your imagination and bring the story to life as much as you are able for the minds of your hearers.
7. Practice! Practice telling the story over and over. Practice in the front of a mirror if necessary, to get your facial expressions to match your words and your emotions.
8. If at all possible, use your Bible as your notes. Hold your Bible as you tell the story. Make sure your audience knows where your story can be found in the Bible. If the audience is a bit older, it would be very appropriate to add a bit of biblical cultural flare to the story.

You will choose one of the following simple bible stories to practice our storytelling:

1. Jonah and the large fish in Jonah 1-2.
2. Jesus walks on the sea in Mark 6:45-51
3. Feeding the five thousand in Mark 6:30-44
4. Blind Bartimaeus was healed in Mark 10:46-52
5. Zacchaeus in the tree in Luke 19:1-10
6. Elisha and the widow's oil in II Kings 4:1-7
7. Abraham's test with Isaac in Genesis 22:1-19
8. Jacob's dream at Bethel in Genesis 28:10-22
9. Moses' call at the burning bush in Exodus 3:1-14

¹³ "The Secret to Great Storytelling."

10. Bitter water made sweet in Exodus 15:22-26

Stories could be chosen by the participants, assigned by the teacher or drawn by numbers on slips of paper from a cup. Use the number of stories that are necessary for the number of participants.

Depending upon the numbers of participants in the group, you, the instructor, could do several things: group participants into small groups of 2-3, ask each participant to solo the storytelling or any other arrangement that seems right to the instructor.

Ask the groups or participants to first sit and read the story from their bibles before they begin the process of figuring out HOW to tell the story. Remember to ask them to read the story several times until they have a very clear picture of the story in their minds.

Give each participant or group ten to thirty minutes, depending upon how much time you have available. As the groups prepare, walk around and coach as participants request. Offer suggestions. Offer ideas for props. Assist in locating props from the area you are in for their stories. Perhaps, give the students a break before the big production begins.

Assign the order or use the numbers of the stories to go in numerical order for the storytelling presentations.

If the story telling does not go as planned, use it as a teaching moment to stop, re-group and start again. Make sure the participants realize that this is a learned art and one that will need to be practiced many times.

After each story, ask the audience to debrief with these questions: *(Perhaps give the participants a copy of the questions prior to the debriefing.)*

1. What went well with the storytelling?
2. What did not go so well?
3. What was the main lesson/point of the story? The purpose?
4. What is one positive, constructive comment that could make this story even better?
5. What was one thing that the storyteller did that you thought was so clever or wonderful?
6. What sort of lesson topic would this particular story go well with—in the future?

It is recommended to allow all participants to take a break before completing the lesson.

Check for Retention & Summarize

In this lesson, we have discussed several points that we will link back to the lesson objectives:

- We have understood and demonstrated knowledge of why oral storytelling is vitally important across all cultures

- We have realized that storytelling is one of the oldest and most effective ways to teach and impart information and empathy
- We have comprehended that oral storytelling is communication and are now able to name five of the seven purposes of narrative storytelling
- We have understood and demonstrated several storytelling techniques
- We were prepared to effectively add narrative storytelling to our lesson plans today and in the future
- We were able to effectively demonstrate the oral telling of a Bible story with a few simple props

Understanding an oral culture of storytelling is vitally important for all instructors everywhere! We must realize that hearing a story of any sort puts our entire brain to work. Someone said that "...storytelling is the only way to plant ideas into other people's minds."¹⁴ From this lesson, a powerful take-away is that storytelling is one of the most underused and the oldest methods of teaching. We must incorporate this method of teaching into our lessons, sermons and daily lives!

Pray to conclude—invite students to ask God for a HUNGER for His Word and for masterfully and powerfully teaching in His kingdom.

EXIT Ticket

Invite students to complete an **EXIT Ticket** for this lesson.

1. Take-away from the lesson—the most important thing you are taking away from the session. Offer specific examples of your learning.

The exit tickets serve as feedback to the instructor as well as a formative assessment.

Ideally, the question could be given to students at the beginning of the lesson so they could be listening and taking notes for the EXIT Ticket from the beginning.

¹⁴ Widrich, "The Science of Storytelling: Why Telling a Story Is the Most Powerful Way to Activate Our Brains."

The Teacher and Oral Culture

Lesson in Review

Name: _____

Nation: _____ Date: _____

1. Explain why storytelling is so powerful and impactful as a teaching strategy. Be sure to offer more than three reasons.

2. Demonstrate through your explanation how storytelling has been an effective tool to preserve legends, stories and traditions across all cultures through the years.

3. What lessons did you learn from the story used in class—either the video or the Needle parable. Write at least 4-5 lessons you learned from either/both story/stories.

4. How do we learn by hearing a story told to us?

5. Name and describe five of the seven forms of narrative storytelling.

6. List three-four methods or techniques that are effective when telling a bible story.

7. What is a prop? Why are the utilization of props so important in conveying a point to the audience?

8. How does the use of a prop build the imagination or imagery of the audience?

9. What is most effective: telling or showing? How does that occur with storytelling?

10. When preparing for a bible story, what is one of the MOST important pieces of information to remember? (*Hold your bible while telling the story and read the story from the bible many, many times before telling to ensure accuracy*)

11. What important lesson or lessons did you learn through the telling of the bible story during the session? Be sure to give the lesson or lessons and your complete thinking.

12. Evaluate yourself and the past few lessons you have taught. Did you apply the use of oral culture, or storytelling, in any of those lessons? Why or why not? Explain.

13. Thinking about what you have learned today about the importance of oral culture, explain how you will seek to add storytelling to every applicable lesson in the future.

14. What are some specific lessons/sermons you will add a story to or simply add a prop to an existing story?

15. Consider someone you have heard preach a sermon or teach a lesson that employed the use of storytelling in their delivery. How did that story come alive in your heart and mind as they told the story?

16. How will you continue to spread the importance of the oral culture message in your circle of influence?

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Appendix

STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES

Be true to the Bible story when you tell it. Do not embellish the story. The Bible story you tell, will be the oral Bible the listeners hear and learn.

Be yourself as you tell the story. God created you very special. Therefore, use your uniqueness and be natural.

Seek to improve your storytelling. Gradually add some new techniques to improve your storytelling. Also, gain new insights as you listen and observe other storytellers.

Here are some suggestions on storytelling techniques.

1. Storytelling adventure

- Take your listeners on a storytelling adventure, without embellishing a story.
- Example: For the story of Jesus calming the storm, tell the story in such a way that the listeners mentally visualize the disciples on the boat terrified as the waves hit against the boat. But, Jesus was asleep on a cushion at the stern of the boat. So the disciples woke Jesus up to save them from the storm.

2. Eyes

- Look at your listeners' faces, especially their eyes, as you tell the story. An exception is when you are using the **Storytelling V** in a dialogue. (Read section #6 on Dialogue.)
- Stand where you can see all the listeners and observe their reactions as you tell the story.
- Direct your eyes to show a character's social position in the story.
Examples: # Look upward (praying to God, speaking to someone in authority, etc.).
 - Look downward (God speaking to man, ruler speaking to servant, etc.).

3. Facial expressions and body position

- Show the mood of the character through your facial expressions.
- Use body positions and hand gestures to express the character's attitude.
- Examples: # Happiness: smile on face, eyes alert, body relaxed
 - Sadness: frown on lips and forehead, shoulders hunched downward
 - Anger: stern look, clenched fists, body rigid
- Do not let your gestures distract from the story.
- Example: Waving your hands too much and constantly walking rapidly back and forth, can distract the listeners from giving their full attention to hearing the story.
- Avoid having your back to the listeners. Listeners need to see your facial expressions and people who have difficulty hearing will read your lips.

4. Voice

- Use a conversational tone.
- Speak loud enough so all your listeners can hear you tell the story.
- Speak slow enough to be understood. Speaking too fast will lose the listeners' attention.
- # Use tones to reflect a character's attitude: sadness, happiness, bewilderment, anger, etc.
- # Example: For the story of Jonah, the captain went and woke him up. The captain asked Jonah, "How can you be sleeping during this terrible storm?" (Speak the captain's question with firmness, authority and a strong tone of voice.)

5. Pause

- Use a pause after a phrase to give emphasis on that particular phrase.
- Use a pause between an action or a change in location, so your listeners can catch up to that part of the story before starting another part of the story.
- Example: # For the story of the creation, pause between the end of one day's creation and beginning the next day's creation.

Example: # For the story of Jesus talking to Peter after His resurrection:
Jesus asked, PAUSE. *Peter, do you love Me more than these?* PAUSE.
Peter answered, PAUSE. *Yes, my Lord, you know that I love you.* PAUSE.

6. Dialogue

- Limit a dialogue to two characters at a time.
- Tell who is speaking and to whom he is speaking before each dialogue exchange.
- Example: After Jesus' resurrection, Peter and six other disciples went fishing. Jesus appeared and prepared breakfast for His disciples. After eating, Jesus spoke to Peter.
Jesus asked, "*Peter, do you love Me more than these?*"
Peter replied, "*Yes, my Lord, you know that I love You.*"
- Use the **Storytelling V**. What is the **Storytelling V**? During a dialogue, remain in one location, but turn slightly to the right as a character speaks to someone. Then turn slightly to the left as the other character looks at the speaker and responds. Continue this movement throughout the dialogue.
- Keep the same position for each character throughout the dialogue.
- Example: For the story of Jesus talking to Peter after His resurrection:
 - Turn slightly to the right as Jesus looks at Peter and says, "*Peter, do you love Me more than these?*"
 - Then turn slightly to the left as Peter looks at Jesus and responds, "*Yes, my Lord, you know that I love You.*"
 - Continue this movement during the entire dialogue.
 - Be careful to always look in the same direction when Jesus is speaking to Peter, and when Peter is speaking to Jesus.

7. Names of the characters

- Limit the names of main characters in the story. Too many names distract the listeners.
- Change pronouns to proper names for main characters.
- # Give role, position or relationship for minor characters.
- # Example: For the story of David and Goliath:
 - Main characters: David, King Saul and Goliath
 - Minor characters: David's father, the enemy (Philistines), David's brothers

8. Scenery

- Stay within the vision of your listeners as you tell the story.
- Visualize stage scenes for the area where you will tell the story. Then within your stage mark off scenes for locations, people and events.
- Walk to that area (scene) when telling that part of the story. Or, look at that location when telling that part (scene) of the story, especially if you are sitting as you tell the story.
- Always keep the same location for a scene throughout the telling of the story. Confusion results when you switch locations, especially to deaf people.

- Examples: # For the creation story, decide where each scene is located on stage: water, land, etc. Be sure to put the fish in the water and animals on dry land.
 - For the story of Jesus and His seven disciples after His resurrection, decide where each scene is located on stage: the disciples fishing in the boat, Jesus standing on the shore, eating breakfast, and Jesus speaking to Peter.
- Some people are very expressive and walk around as they tell the story. Other storytellers remain still, using their facial expressions and slight hand motions as they tell the story. Be yourself.
- Pauses can serve as oral quotation marks

Alternative Story to use instead of the *Birds on a Wire* storytelling exercise:

To use this story these steps are recommended:

- Locate a large needle to use as a prop – an object to show while telling the story
- Practice telling the story several times to almost know the story so well that you engage facial expressions and perhaps, change your voice between the lady's and the needle's voice.
- Instead of telling the story to the whole group, give the printed story to each group and ask them to tell the story to each other in the group. (This idea would necessitate more needles as props but pencils or anything long and slender could be used a props for needles.)

The Parable of the Needle

Written by Margaret Fowler

He was a bright little fellow, one of the shiniest of his kind and his body shone like gleaming silver from top to toe.

"Yes, I am very fine indeed," he decided as his eye glanced proudly down his entire length, "straight and slim, and as sharp as a needle," (which is *exactly* what he was).

One day this little needle opened his eye very widely to look around and was surprised to discover that he was not alone in the world. He was just one in a whole package of needles and the discouraging thing was that they all looked just the same as he did.

"How very disappointing!" he muttered, "I thought I was the finest thing in the world, and here are all these others just as shiny as I am...Of course they couldn't possibly be as nice as I am," he added.

How long he remained there with nothing happening at all, he had no idea, because it is impossible to tell how much time is passing if you are a needle. But, after a long-time, things began to happen, and he found his package was being bumped about all over the place. Suddenly the top of the package flew open right before him. Surely that was the largest needle in the world staring down at him! It had a lot of silvery strands at the top, and the most surprising thing of all was that it had two very large eyes and more needle-like pieces sticking out at the sides.

The next moment, one of these had reached and grasped his companion. Our needle watched in amazement as this enormous 'thing' put a piece of thread right through his friend's eye and began vigorously pushing him in and out pf various pieces of cloth. This went on for some time and then he was put back in the package, and the hero of our story promptly began asking him questions.

"Whatever was that frightening-looking thing that picked you up? What was it doing to you? Did it hurt? Strangest thing I've ever seen in my life, I must say!"

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But the other needle was too tired to talk: “Lots of work,” he muttered wearily, “lots and lots of work...lots and lots...” and he drifted off into a deep sleep.

Day after day this strange adventure was repeated, and our little friend watched the other needles taken out one by one and used in the same way.

He learned that what he had believed to be a giant needle was called a “lady” in human language. He even learned much of this language as he listened to her conversation.

He began looking forward to seeing her each day as he sat in his cozy box and it wasn't very long before he knew that he loved her very much.

“I'm not afraid now,” he whispered to his companions. “I trust myself completely in her hands; and oh! I wonder...yes, I do hope she will take me and use me some day,” he added wistfully.

Every day our needle longed to be picked up and used, but when his chance came at last, he behaved in a most surprising way.

At first, he was overjoyed when the fingers of that lovely hand gently reached down and pulled him out. Here he was closer to her face and he looked up so trustingly. He was thrilled that at least he was to be used by her skillful hands. Then he glanced over the basket of clothes to be sewn and mended and his heart sank. It was a tremendous pile, bulging with little socks, several shirts, frilly dresses and blouses, pajamas, sheets and some well-worn pants. Suddenly, he panicked at the thought of all that work. His joy vanished and all he could think of was getting away!

“I can't possibly do all that! I can't, I can't, I can't!” he repeated in despair.

So, when the lady tried to put the thread through his eye, he managed to wriggle around just enough to slip right out of her hand and down to the rug.

“Dear me!” sighed the lady, “How did I drop that needle?” And she knelt down to look for it. But it was a thick rug—the fluffy kind you can sink down into with your feet—and besides that, it was silvery-beige in color, so it was very easy for the needle to snuggle down inside the soft pile and keep himself hidden away.

“I won't let her find me,” he slyly thought. “I'll just stay here and never do any work for her. I still love her, and I think she is quite wonderful, but I don't want to have to *do* anything. It looks too hard for me!”

After searching for some time, the lady sighed again, “It's no use,” she said wearily. “My eyes are not as good as they were. It's almost as if that needle doesn't want to be found.” And taking another from the package, she began sewing.

The needle in the rug stayed there for several days. He was very content at first, but after a while, he became lonely. He was slowly learning another important lesson in life and he was very sorry he had acted so badly. Yes, he was learning that you cannot be really happy if you are not willing to work for the one you love, willing to be used when that one needs you. And he wished he could have another chance.

“Please, please look for me again,” he whispered. “I'm over here, near the rocking chair, behind that little tuft of rug that sticks up more than the others, I'm shining my best for you. Please come and find me.”

But alas! Her ears were not too good either, he decided, or perhaps she just couldn't understand needle language, because she didn't seem to hear him. He was

learning patience too and altogether he was become a much more self-controlled fellow than he had been in the past. Then came the day which he would always remember.

“Why! There’s that little needle I lost,” exclaimed a triumphant voice. The gentle fingers were reaching for him, grasping him, once again about to put a piece of thread through him. A new feeling gripped our needle. As he looked at the stack in the basket, he wasn’t afraid, but he was filled with pride.

“I can do that by myself!” he almost shouted the words. “I don’t need thread. I don’t need her hand to push me in and out. I’m doing this by myself!”

And with that, he gave a violent wiggle and managed to slip through her fingers again and slithered down onto the pile of clothes.

There he met his biggest surprise of all. He was absolutely helpless! He had no power of his own to move through the clothes in the way he had watched his friends at work. He lay there feeling very ashamed.

“I can see it now,” he whispered sadly. “I must let myself rest in her hand and let that hand guide me through the clothes or I shall never be any use at all. I have no power without her hand. Well, I will let her take me and use me now, just as I am, if she will only let me try again.”

To his great delight, she was not angry with him! She was smiling and saying with a chuckle: “Well, you’re the slipperiest needle I’ve ever tried to use.” And with that, she picked him up again and pushed some brightly colored green thread through him. At long last, the needle was working!

The lady’s hand pushed and pulled, and he glided obediently in and out. He was astonished to find that it wasn’t hard at all. He seemed to be flying through the clothes, mending all the torn places, sewing little dresses and shirts, fastening on buttons. He was filled with threads of many colors, bright greens and reds, delicate blues, soft pinks, and yellows, and he decided it was perfectly delightful.

“Surely,” he murmured contentedly as he slipped through the holes of a small red button, “there can be no greater joy than to be held and used by these skillful hands. I’ll never try to hide from the work again, and I certainly won’t try to do it alone anymore. I’ll gladly give myself into her hands whenever she wants to use me.

And with those remarks, the needle smiled from top to bottom, (which is the only direction a needle can smile!), and his needle eye twinkled happily.

And every bit of his fine bright needle face was shining with such a bright sparkle that if you could see inside of his slim shape, you could have almost seen the shiny new heart nestled inside!

1. Ask participants to read through the story or tell the story to each other – or the instructor tell the story several times.
2. Assemble the class into groups of twos or threes.
3. Ask participants to tell the story of *The Parable of the Needle* to each other – provide the needles as props or something else to be used in place of a needle for the object part of the story.
4. Ask participants to divide the story into parts: beginning, middle and ending, to really focus on the progression of the story.

5. After they have several minutes to tell the story of the needle to the group, tell the story one more time for them to solidify the events and the emotion of the story into their brains. Attempt to get each group to add dialogue, events, emotion, etc. to the story.
6. Going back to the same groups as they were assembled in earlier, ask learners to add details to their stories – making sure to capture all the small emotional parts from each of the events.
7. The main goal with this storytelling practice is to practice telling a story. A simple story has the power to communicate many concepts, feelings and truths to the receiver if told correctly.
8. Perhaps, the groups could finish by asking one person from each group to ‘tell’ the new story to the main group.
9. After the storytelling is completed, it is recommended to take a quick break.

Additional resources for storytelling from the Bible:

https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/TB4_Storytelling_AL.pdf

<https://www.relevantchildrensministry.com/2012/01/secret-to-great-storytelling.html>