



# The Window of Illustration

## Sermon Preparation

Baptist Ministers Association of Houston and Vicinity

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### **A window shalt thou make to the ark... (Genesis 6:16)**

When we read the words of our Lord in the gospels, we see that He is a master illustrator. I will venture to say the best known genre among biblical writings is the parable, and in fact, the whole bible is full of ornate language.

The intent of the metaphorical language is to turn a steep intellectual climb into a sliding board of simplicity. It is, perhaps in some sense, to back the audience into comprehension. You've presented your argument and yet there remains a bit of a haze that nothing can clear like a well-placed illustration. Thomas Fuller says, "Reasons are the pillars that make up the fabric of a sermon, but illustrations are the windows that give the best light." A window lets light in, or lets one look out. Either way, a window is to facilitate sight. If you put only one illustration in a sermon of length, it's to the audience like an oasis in the desert. It is a break from the monotony of endless explanation. An illustration opens the window-curtains to illuminate a dark room. Used properly, illustrations will ease your efforts and shorten your discourse. (**WARNING:** *Over-illustration is as bad as under-illustration. There must be balance between augmentation and illustration.*)

**THESIS:** An illustration should not add confusion, complication, and vagueness, but bring clarity, make connection, and remove complexity, resulting in an "aha" moment: "Oh, I see, through the window."

#### **#1 A good illustration makes the abstract concrete.**

An illustration is like fine tuning a pair of binoculars. It brings the blurry into focus. It makes for a vivid, poignant, clarifying, word picture. Your words become a paintbrush to colorize the mental canvases of the hearers. It is to stop merely flying high over head and to put boots on the ground. The strong meat of doctrine is made more palatable with the salt and pepper of parables and metaphors. **NOTE:** *Illustration meets the needs of the visual learner as opposed to the audible learner.*

## **#2 A good illustration is reflective of your audience's experiences.**

An illustration arrests the minds of its hearers quickly because of its familiarity. The bridge of understanding is constructed in the bricks of common knowledge. While at the first they knew not of what you speak; however given the illustration, now you're on their turf. You are speaking their language. Jesus used children, servants, food, farming, animals, etc... (In many instances the pictures are timeless.) These things were common to the people of the time and allowed for the connection to be made. And the result is they know how that works, so now they know this works. You can discern quite a bit about the author, but moreover his audience, by his choice of metaphors. It would be ludicrous to use the algebraic quadratic equation illustratively in a toddler class, or to use the metaphor of skyscrapers in a remote and secluded village of mud huts. The illustration is to serve as a meeting place on common ground.

## **#3 A good illustration will alleviate the need for any further explanation.**

A good illustration is not only simple, but it simplifies. It is an explanation in picture. We often speak of "cutting across the field" in a sermon... well this is cutting through the weeds of the point being made, not with a sickle, but with a weed-eater. An illustration ought not to be complicated. It ought to be simpler than your explanation (**NOTE: Not apart from your explanation.**) Whatever you are "trying" to say is supposed to become immediately vivid and clear, pictured in the story or illustration.

The worse illustration in the world is an illustration that needs further clarification and explanation to willing ears, when in fact the illustration was to serve as exactly that. An illustration is a common instance for common people. Giraffe-metaphors will leave the sheep in a low-lying fog. Such makes your preaching suspect.

**CONCLUSION:** Types, emblems, and instances of comparison and contrast are the adorning beauty of a well-crafted sermon, aimed at leaving with heavy truth that's been made light and easy to carry.

*THINK YOURSELF EMPTY, READ YOURSELF FULL, WRITE YOURSELF CLEAR, PRAY YOURSELF HOT AND GO PREACH JESUS*

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