

Storytelling As Imaginational Art In Christian Education

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Abstract

Storytelling, or creative communication, has numerous benefits in the classroom and in communicating truth outside of the classroom. Research has shown that there are 9 different learning intelligences, but traditional education deals with only two - verbal, and logical-mathematical. This leaves out a large percentage of students who learn in other ways. Storytelling/drama/creative communication allows educators to work with more than one kind of intelligence. Stories connect with our imaginations and emotions, and challenge beliefs and behaviours in non-threatening ways. Several forms of storytelling can be used in and out of the classroom to help deepen the Christian education experience.

keywords: *Storytelling, Communication, Drama, Imaginational Art, Christian education.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I went to see the play “The Christians” at a college in Portland, OR. Portland is, philosophically, an extremely liberal town. And the college doing the play is a very secular, liberal college reflection of that. I found it interesting that they were doing a play called “The Christians” and wanted to see what they were going to do to the Christian message, since there is a tendency for non-Christians to present Christians as narrow-minded, bigoted or even idiotic!

The play takes place in a megachurch that has just paid off its debts, and the pastor declares there is no physical hell. The plot is a series of theological debates, debating the existence of physical hell, what happens to good people who die without knowing Christ, church politics and money, etc. I sat for 1½ hours listening to genuine biblical debates. It was fascinating.

After the play, there was a question-and-answer time with the audience and cast. One audience member asked if the theology of the play impacted the actors at all, or if it was just a theatrical exercise-something they just did as a part of their theatre training. The cast looked at one another and smiled and said, “Half of our rehearsal time every time was spent in theological discussion and study trying to understand what this play was about, it’s religious views, going back and forth with our different viewpoints, trying to be honest and engage in what these characters were believing.”

The young man who played the role of the pastor told me afterwards that he was from an unchurched background, but as part of his research he started visiting a

lot of churches in the Portland area, trying to understand what this “church thing” was all about, and who these Christians were, and what they like. He ended up attending a megachurch and he is there to this day. He has entered into their community. He realized, “These Christians are really nice people! There are great things going on.” To have the cast members acknowledge, “These Christians are different than we thought!” is a huge victory for the gospel. It also shows the process of education - interacting with the source material as actors, and putting themselves in “different shoes,” allowed them to get a new perspective on the Bible and some of its doctrines and challenged their own views.

There is an old saying, attributed to a Chinese Confucian scholar, Xun Kuang, which says, “Tell me, and I’ll forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I’ll understand.” (Xun Kuang) In other words, communication is involvement; and true education is about communicating, not just informing.

With the proliferation of TV and movies, drama and storytelling in its many artistic forms has become one of the most common means of communicating ideas. We have become a very visual society, with very short attention spans, and need to address this accordingly. Lecture is one of the least effective forms of communication. Because drama uses many signal systems to tell its story, the message of the story is retained better, understood more, and taken to heart to a greater degree than mere lecture.

Education experts tell us that “Drama is powerful because its unique balance of thought and feeling makes learning exciting, challenging, relevant to real-life concerns, and enjoyable.” Recent brain research proves that emotions are linked with learning. When we connect to the concept emotionally, we will have a better understanding of it. Teaching using drama and story brings emotion and learning together because drama involves the mind, will and emotions. It is all-involving. The arts communicate in ways that mere speaking cannot. It speaks to the heart where words can’t. It engages our need for expression and creativity. Art compels attention because it tells something of truth.

Dr. Howard Gardner, at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education, has developed a theory of multiple intelligences that suggests that students learn in many different ways. We all have different intelligence that reflects how we learn and what interests us; these types of intelligence include verbal, logical-mathematical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Our education systems teach, test, reinforce, and reward primarily two kinds of intelligence-verbal and logical-mathematical” (Dickison). When we rely only on verbal intelligence, we miss out on communicating with a large percentage of our students. One educator states:

Some students can learn effectively by listening, and they do very well in traditional classrooms where most of the information is presented orally. Studies such as those done by Lynn O’Brien of Specific Diagnostic Studies, note that these students whose strongest learning channel is auditory comprise less than 15% of the population. On the other hand, students who demonstrate a visual learning style are about 40% of the population. It is important for them to have illustrations, charts, and diagrams along with words and numbers. There are also many students who must hold ideas in their hands before they can understand and learn. Abstractions presented in words and numbers may not be easily understood without manipulatives or concrete examples. These kinesthetic or haptic students form around 45% of the population. Understandably, many of them have difficulty learning in conventional

classrooms since very little hands-on learning is available in most classes after early primary grades (Dickison).

II. METHODOLOGY

Imaginational arts can engage students who learn with other intelligences than verbal or logical. Drama and story as a teaching method allows students to be fully involved with the learning process. Educators point out that learning happens through active participation, or “learning by doing.” Another educator, John Dewey, called imagination the “gateway through which meanings are derived from past experiences that are carried into the present.” Stories are a prime way of carrying this out.

Using story, role play, drama and other imaginational arts in the classroom, and other teaching situations, means getting students physically involved with creating the story, from creating scenes and dialogue, to discussing character and meaning, to applying their imagination to creatively solve a problem - something like the experience of the Portland university students and how they learned Christian theology through the process of putting on the play. It challenges basic beliefs and behaviors in a non-threatening way.

The arts communicate in ways that mere speaking cannot. It speaks to the heart where words can't. It engages our need for expression and creativity. Art compels attention because it tells something of the truth.

“The purpose of the fine arts is to help us to see, to feel, and to appreciate the world in which we live. They are concerned, not with prosaic facts, but with the poetic joy of discovering beauty wherever it may be found.” (Maus, 2)

Through the arts, we also gain a heightened awareness of life. The purpose of most art is to show some recognizable human experience—to observe life and then present it to the rest of the world for their consideration and contemplation. The arts make us more aware of life and its experiences and help us to live it more thoroughly.

2.1 Storytelling Is A Universal Form Of Communication.

People everywhere love a good story: stories of the life experience of others, stories about the day, or stories to communicate a point. We pass on our personal and family history through the telling and retelling of stories (Steffen, 120). With the proliferation of TV and movies, drama has become one of the most common means of communicating ideas. The average viewer probably watches two to four hours of television a night, and movies are one of the most popular forms of entertainment. With the increase in television and film viewing comes a decreasing attention span. The average TV image lasts less than three seconds, and an average story bite is generally around seven to ten minutes. As a result of this kind of image training, we have become a very visual society, with very short attention spans, and we need to address our target audiences accordingly. This does not rule out teaching the audience through the lecture form, but it would be a long process for them to come to fully appreciate that style of communication.

2.2 More Than Half Of The World's Population Prefers The Concrete Mode Of Learning.

Illiterates and semi-literates probably outnumber literates. Non-literates “tend to express themselves more through concrete forms (stories and symbols) than abstract concepts (propositional thinking and philosophy).” While it is good to encourage literacy and abstract thinking, why must this be the first step in reaching a

people? Should we not rather communicate in a style that best suits their thought processes?

The lecture format is no longer at the center of American popular culture, and has never been the center of most other cultures. It is also proven that lecture is one of the least effective forms of communication. We retain much more what we see than of what we hear (and even more of what we hear and see). Communication takes place through verbal and nonverbal signals. Systematizing communication according to twelve signal systems helps us better analyze how communication is taking place. When several signal systems are used together, a greater amount of information can be communicated, and the impact of the message is increased dramatically. "Using several signal systems in combination is similar to adding more pipes to a water system. A larger number of pipes carry more water. Similarly, each added signal system increases the information load carried" (Smith, 161). This is where drama comes in. It is first of all a story - and we are "hard-wired" to remember stories—and it combines several signal systems to get across a complex message. Combining these stimuli reinforces the message and increases retention. The audience remembers the drama and reflects longer on the message.

2.3 Stories Connect With Our Imagination And Emotions.

The arts give us perspective, beauty, and engage us in interpretation. Through the use of metaphors, symbols, and images, art attempts to put meaning in a tangible form. Its goal is to get the audience to use their imaginations to recreate the experience of the speaker/painter/ poet and carries them along to the conclusion. Our emotions become involved as we enter the world of the characters and relate to their situation. Our minds are engaged in interpreting what the work means to us, so there is no passive observance of art, but a putting of ourselves into the situation and responding to it.

We, as human beings, need to express ourselves. We have many feelings and experiences that we want to let out, to tell, but lack the ability of clear expression. The arts help give order and form to that need for expression. We turn our pain into art so we can bear it, and our joys into art so we can prolong them. In summary, the arts give expression to the feelings, experiences, and beliefs of the human race. They express experiences and values that are important to us and intensify our involvement with life.

2.4 Every Major Religion Uses Stories To Socialize Its Young, Convert Potential Followers, and Indoctrinate Members. The Same Can Be Said Of Non-Religious Groups.

Stories are a non-threatening way of challenging basic beliefs and behavior. We not only get new information through the arts, but also rediscover things we may have forgotten. Portraying things in a new way gives a fresh look at the familiar. We are caused to look at the subject in a different way, thus coming to a new and better understanding. In this way, the arts are a mirror in which we see ourselves. They capture universal and enduring human experience by beginning with something real-what can be seen, touched, tasted, heard, smelled-and adding an interpretive element to the experience.

The human element of the actors places the truth to be learned within the context of real life, not in the realm of the abstract. It shows real people in real situations, resolving issues, and providing a model for others to follow.

2.5 Approximately 75% Of The Bible Is Narrative.

75% of the Bible is in narrative form (history, recounting of people and events), with approximately 15% as poetry (songs, lamentations, and proverbs that express a variety of deep inner emotion). This leaves only 10% as thought-organized text (the logical, linear writing of Paul). If God communicated the majority of his message to the world through stories, why do Christian workers spend the majority of time teaching in the Scripture's smallest literary style? (Steffen, 124).

2.6 Stories Create Instant Evangelists.

People find it very easy to repeat a good story. Whether the story centers around juicy gossip or the gospel of Jesus Christ, something within each of us wants to hear and tell such stories. Suppressing a good story is like trying to resist a jar full of one's favorite cookies. Sooner or later, the temptation becomes too strong. The cookie gets eaten; the story gets told (Steffen, 124). We have all passed on a good joke, story or news item that we've heard. The gospel of Jesus Christ is also, after all, the "good news," or "good story." Viewing it in the light of a story makes it easier for anyone to retell.

2.7 Jesus Taught Theology Through Stories.

Jesus chose to reveal theology through parabolic stories, knowing their double-edged ability to entertain, arouse curiosity, and to teach. After all, people listen to stories where they won't listen to plain talk.

When a Bible teacher exegeses theology from a story, he or she is exchanging teaching mediums, not message content. The question becomes, which medium best communicates the message? Not, Which medium possesses theology?... Stories do not just illustrate theology... they are theology. If Jesus relied on parabolic stories to communicate his message, does this not imply theology lies resident in the stories? (Steffen, 117).

Let's look more specifically at how we can use imaginational art in Christian education.

2.8 Dramatic Art And Bible Knowledge.

I was directing a play for our church about the book of Galatians. I had cast a young university student in one of the roles. She was enthusiastic and very talented. One day she called me in tears, asking to meet with me because her boyfriend had just left her for another woman. I sat with her, and heard her story. She claimed to be a Christian, and attended church and sang in worship teams, yet her boyfriend was a Muslim, and she admitted she frequently skipped church so that she could sleep with him. She was distraught at his having left for someone else, but asked me if I thought she should take him back if he came back to her. I said to her, "You know what the Bible says about being unequally yoked with unbelievers!" She looked at me and said, "What does it say?" I asked, "How much of the Bible have you read?" She admitted that she had read the book of Luke in Religious Education class in school, but that was all. Her functional knowledge of the Bible was nearly nil, so it was no wonder that her life choices did not reflect a redeemed lifestyle! It was a blessing that we were working on the Galatian's play, which deals with salvation by grace; it became a wonderful chance to disciple her in gaining knowledge of the Scriptures and a biblical view of a redeemed life, and how they applied to her life.

I have been a part of, or directed, many plays that are based solidly on the Bible: Ephesians, Philippians, Job, Luke, and Esther, to name a few. Time and time

again the audience has sent us feedback to say that they ran back to their Bibles afterward to read the book for themselves, in order to learn more of the story, or confirm details that caught their interest. One newspaper reviewer had this to say about our recent play on women in the Bible:

But I confess, the show made me scurry home to examine my Bible to find out if the play was actually meant to exclusively portray women mentioned in the Good Book, or did the playwright simply exercise a bit of poetic license.

I had to do a bit of biblical research to see if it was I who had the blind spot, not having come across women in the Bible like Claudia, Rizpah and Michal. I have a friend named Rahab but didn't know she had been a harlot mentioned ten times in the Old Testament for her heroic role in hiding two of Joshua's spies who'd come to check out the opposition at Jericho. But somehow, I'd overlooked her as well as Rizpah and Michal (Margaretta wa Gacheru, Kenyan Arts- Business Daily, Nation newspaper). One play on the book of Job was a straight reading of the Scripture, done in creative ways. Another play modernized the language and set it as a play within a play, which showed the problem of suffering in the context of Job.

Using dramatic and creative reading styles when teaching with text is another very \ helpful tool in education. It helps to stimulate the imagination as people listen to the story being read, and increases understanding. There are various techniques that can be used, from using character voices, to dividing among multiple voices in a round, or adding on, to illustrating the passage dramatically as it is being read, to name just a few. For example, Daniel chapter 11 is a difficult passage to follow, dealing with multiple prophecies. However, through the use of 3 narrators, assigning "king of the north" verses to one narrator and "king of the south" verses to another, and all else to a third, and having them move in a "battle plan" up and down the aisles of the church as they read, it was much easier for the congregation to understand what was happening in the passage. One person even said, "I understood everything so clearly!"

Similarly, in reading from Nehemiah about the building of the wall. Listen to this section of the passage:

The Old City Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid the beams, set up its doors, and installed its bolts and bars. Next to them were Melatiah from Gibeon, Jadon from Meronoth, people from Gibeon, and people from Mizpah, the headquarters of the governor of the province west of the Euphrates River. Next was Uzziel son of Harhaiah, a goldsmith by trade, who also worked on the wall. Beyond him was Hananiah, a manufacturer of perfumes. They left out a section of Jerusalem as they built the Broad Wall (Neh. 3:6-8).

In reading this during a worship service, the readers each took one family and read that verse (e.g. "The Old City Gate was repaired by Joiada...") and went and stood on stage. The next person took the next family and read that verse while moving to stand next to the first person, then the next person read and stood, and so on, so that the wall was "built" by the bodies of the readers as they went through the list. When they were done, the preacher himself said, "There is no need to preach today because it has already been said!" (If possible, we can show a video clip of a reading of Job, and some verses from the New Testament.)

In all these plays, actors and audience alike saw and heard Scripture brought to life; actors engaged with the text in rehearsal and performance, applying it to their lives, increasing their knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

2.9 Dramatic Art And Theology

Following closely after teaching Bible knowledge, drama and stories are also excellent ways to teach theology, because they show it in the process of real situations. I am currently working with an actor on a monologue based on the prophet Jeremiah, the “weeping” prophet. Jeremiah laments, and grieves over the people of Israel through tears and mourning, and, as expounded on in the monologue, through the process of lament he comes to feel the grief that God must feel over people who have turned away from him. In a sermon, we could tell people that God grieves and mourns, but it doesn’t have a lot of power. However, when they see and experience Jeremiah mourning and crying on stage, and listen to him reflecting on how that helps him understand God’s pain, then they come away thinking, “God feels pain! He understands my pain! I have felt a bit of his grief!” They have learned an attribute of God, that he is not just a judgmental God, but one who grieves over sin and pain.

Another play might deal with what happened to Jesus after he was crucified but before he resurrected. Where did he go? What did he do? Plays have been written that explore that doctrinal question-ne such play takes place in hell, with the Seven Deadly Sins, Hell, Death and Satan waiting for Christ to come so they can gloat about their victory over him, only to have him come and defeat them all, pass judgement on them, break the gates of hell and leave. It is a very dramatic way to get people involved in theology.

2.10 Assist Teaching By Looking At A Subject From Different Perspectives

It is always helpful in teaching to approach a subject from many different perspectives. This might involve telling a series of stories, or using a series of dramatic scenes, or looking at the subject from a different point of view. An example of a story that does this is C.S. Lewis’ Screwtape Letters, where a “head demon” is heard lecturing demons in training about how to get their humans to reject God. Another example comes from a teaching time on Psalm 91, where various readings and songs were used to express different elements of the Psalm, reflecting on God as our refuge. Alternatively, we can look at a series of interpretations of Psalm 23, which help the student or audience to reflect on what happens when we do not have the Lord as our shepherd.

THE DRUG ADDICT’S PSALM

King Cocaine is my shepherd, I shall always want.

He maketh me to lie down in the gutters.

He leadeth me beside the troubled waters.

He destroyeth my soul.

He leadeth me in the paths of wickedness for the effort’s sake. Yea, I shall walk through the valley of poverty and will fear all evil, for thou, Cocaine, art with me.

Thy needle and capsule try to comfort me.

Thou strippest the table of groceries in the presence of my family. Thou robbest my head of reason.

My cup of sorrow runneth over.

Surely cocaine addiction shall stalk me all the days of my life And I will dwell in the House of the Damned forever.

SELFISH VERSION

Ambition is my shepherd, I shall not want for anything someday. It maketh me not to lie down.

It leadeth me to greater effort.

It restoreth my energies when I am tired.

It leadeth me into such paths as will further and hurry my progress. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of reversal I will not fear, but press on relentlessly—for the future is with me. The goal, the prize—they dazzle me.

Thou preparest a table for me in a big mansion one day.

Thou anointest my head with great determination; the possibilities run over.

Surely wealth and position will be my lot for the rest of my days, And I will dwell in the gates of the city, honored and admired by all.

THE 23RD CHANNEL

The TV set is my shepherd.

My spiritual growth shall want.

It maketh me to sit down and do nothing for His name's sake, Because it requireth all my spare time.

It keepeth me from doing my duty as a Christian,

Because it presenteth so many good shows that I must see.

It restoreth my knowledge of the things of the world,

And keepeth me from the study of God's Word.

It leadeth me in the paths of failing to attend the evening worship services, and doing nothing in the Kingdom of God.

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, BUT....

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

But Lord, You know I don't have time today for You to lead me.

Perhaps tomorrow. Or the next day.

I SHALL NOT WANT.

I know that I don't actually want for the necessities of life, Lord, but there are so many things I could use—my own TV, for instance, and a new car and a bigger bank account. Come to think of it, there are a lot of things I want!

HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES.

In green pastures! I certainly don't have the time to go out and lie down in some grassy meadow.

HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS.

A pleasant enough phrase. I hope that someday in heaven I'll take just such a walk with You Lord. But you know how it is here—a million things to do all the time...

HE RESTORETH MY SOUL.

He what? Oh, restore—like when you take an old table and refinish it so you can use it some more. That's a lot of work, isn't it? Well, if You want to, go ahead, Lord. But I can just as well keep on using my soul the way it is.

HE LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE.

I'm all for righteousness, Lord, but I have so many other things to do. Could we postpone this little jaunt for a while?

YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR THOU ART WITH ME. You will be with me, won't You, Lord? I can't go through that all by myself.

THY ROD AND THY STAFF THEY COMFORT ME.

How about a little more staff and a little less rod? What are You trying to make me into—a saint?

THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES.

So far it's been me watching my enemies feasting and making merry. Let's show them!

THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL.

What for?

MY CUP RUNNETH OVER.

Actually, there are a few more things I would like that I forgot to mention—new furniture, a lot more clothes, a trip to Europe...

SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE: AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER.

I'm kind of busy right now, Lord—but You will save room for me, won't You?

Helps to illustrate a major point of a message or lesson

A good teacher will use illustrations to set up the problem they are addressing, or make the point more clearly. Relating the lesson to something in everyday life increasing comprehension, provides interest and variety, and gets past people's defenses. If the lesson of the day is about what the Bible has to say about bribery, for instance, then the teacher could tell a story about how they were faced with a situation that demanded a bribe, and how they responded.

The human element of the actors places the truth to be learned within the context of real life, not in the realm of the abstract. It shows real people in real situations, resolving issues, and providing a model for others to follow (models Biblical principles in action in people's lives). It changes their beliefs as they go through the educational journey of applying God's biblical truth to daily life.

(If possible, can show an excerpt of "Mourners," which deals with Jairus' daughter.)

Storytelling increases discussion and community around a topic

Learning happens when people can discuss a message and how to apply it. It is a part of the communication process which introduces new information, gets people to interact with it and discuss it in their networks, and then leads to points of action. Adding that dimension to storytelling and drama is a wonderful way to increase involvement with the lesson.

There are several ways to increase opportunities for discussion in drama. Many forms of participatory theatre are based on this premise, where audience members get involved in the actual story-creation process, and the audience is encouraged to give their feedback during and after the performance. For example, I was training a group in participatory theatre. We chose the topic of bribery to explore. The group created a short scene where a young man was stopped by a policeman and threatened, in order for the policeman to receive a bribe. They acted out the scene as it often plays out in their context; then we discussed alternatives for the young man. A volunteer was invited to come take the actor's place and play out his given alternative, which was to run away. The actors acted the scene again, this time with the audience member acting out their chosen action. It didn't go to plan,

however. The policeman chased down the young man and beat him up! As we debriefed from that scenario, they realized that that was not a viable alternative. We then picked a new volunteer to try out a new option. Another form that I have found excellent at generating feedback is called Playback theatre. I first used playback following the post-election violence in Kenya of 2008. It was a wonderful processing and healing tool for people. The story you are about to see comes from a session with victims of the post-election violence where they were able to come together and tell their story, then the playback actors reenacted it for them in various theatrical forms. This was the story of one pastor who sheltered people in his house from the killing bands that were going around.

(Video excerpt of playback theatre)

Bitok's story:

"We know you're in there, pastor! Open the door, or we will kill this girl!" Pastor Bitok peered out his window at the gang of youth beating on his door, and holding down a screaming girl. It was his landlord's daughter. He recognized some of the youth. To save the girl he unlocked his door; the gang rushed in, smashing his furniture, grabbing all they could carry and savagely whipping and beating him, breaking his spine, and leaving him paralyzed. "This is a warning, pastor, for sheltering the enemy, and for marrying outside our tribe. We're watching you!"

The Playback Theatre actors listened intently as Pastor Bitok shared his story. When he finished speaking, they would immediately play his story back to the audience. The event was a trauma healing forum following Kenya's 2007-2008 post-election violence, and the pastor was one who was savagely beaten for sheltering members of the targeted tribe in the area.

As the drama team emotionally and artistically played back the story, all eyes were riveted to the stage as the audience listened and cried. As the actors finished, they turned to Pastor Bitok. His head was buried in his hands, as he wept. People were amazed—Kalenjin men don't cry!

Afterwards, he said:

"When I shared it was still personal. When the drama team began to act – especially the guy who took my place and acted on behalf of me –I felt it's no longer me, it's someone else feeling it. And when people responded, when people began to express their emotions with me, I felt the burden is no longer me alone, I have people who feel me, people who identify with me, people who have taken over the burden. So right now I feel so free. It brings a lot of healing."

Those in the room with this man also transformed because they experienced the pain of tribal violence vicariously through the story, and saw and felt the wrongness of it all. Out of those experiences has grown playback for discipleship—playing back sermons, conference experiences, and prayer, workplace experiences. When you think about the need in education to receive feedback to ensure that understanding has taken place, then you can appreciate the value of a form of drama such as playback, which allows the audience to process what they have just heard immediately, before they leave. It helps the teacher, too, to see what those listening have understood and responded to in the lesson.

A play can raise many questions, or open up avenues for discussion about topics that might be taboo, or difficult to talk about. Creating opportunities around a play for further discussion is a good way to help the viewers process what they have seen, apply it, and take further action. I performed a play some years ago, called 'Night, Mother, which dealt with a mother-daughter relationship and the depression and suicide of the daughter. It ended on a very shocking note, with the daughter

shooting herself off stage. Knowing that there are many people in Kenya who are dealing with depression, and seeing an increasing rise in suicide, I could not just stop the experience with the end of the script. Depression and suicide are a rising problem in Kenya and it is still considered a criminal act, yet there are very few resources to help people struggling with it. Therefore, we created a panel of experts who engaged the audience in discussion and information-giving after the curtain call. Psychiatrists, mental health workers, and counselors listened to audience members who shared their stories, and offered help and solutions. Counselors were available through the play and afterwards, to talk and pray with people who were triggered by the play, and informational fliers were handed out with resources on mental health. One audience member wrote later:

“I was already gathering my bags when a producer announced that a panel of mental health experts...would help the audience synthesize the emotive play we had just watched. Sigh of relief swept across the solemn auditorium; I bet everyone was grateful for a chance to unpack the emotions triggered by the gunshot sound emanating from Jessie’s room at the end of the play. Using the example of Jessie’s frustrations...we were educated on what to look out for and how to support mentally ill patients.”

The counselors involved saw the need for further awareness, and created an annual arts festival centered around mental health issues. From this, and many other instances, we can see that drama and other imaginal arts can lead to further discussion and activity as well. It promotes discipleship and community, giving a place to work through change in response to a message, and ultimately leading to deeper learning and transformation.

“Why take the artistic way to prove so much?
Because, it is the glory and good of Art,
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.” Browning

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