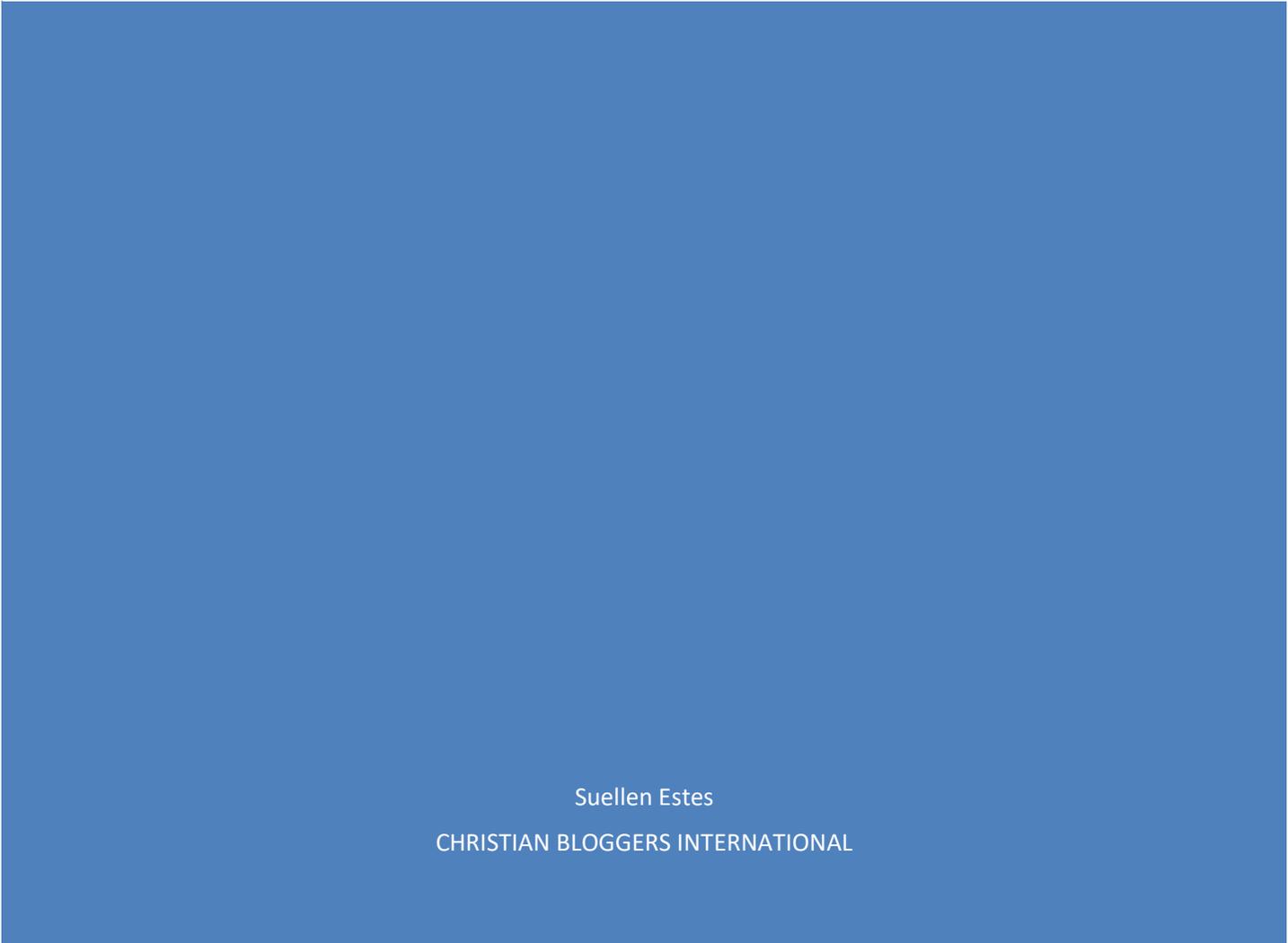




**TRANSCRIPT WEBINAR 2B:
PAINT PICTURES AND
STORIES FOR MEMORABLE
WRITING**



Suellen Estes

CHRISTIAN BLOGGERS INTERNATIONAL

Webinar 2B Paint Pictures and Stories for Memorable Writing

Let's Communicate

What are we doing when we write a book? What is our goal?

Think with me about this for a little while.

We are communicating with our readers. We are sharing our thoughts and ideas.

So how do we do that? How do we get our thoughts from our minds to theirs? How do we do this effectively?

How do we as humans receive communication?

I think that if we back away from the detail of writing for a minute and think through these things, we will be better writers. And we will become more confident in what we are doing.

The Bible gives us a good example of great communication. And basically we have three ways.

We have pictures – like dreams or visions – given to the writers. Throughout the Bible, people were led by dreams or visions.

We have stories and anecdotes. Like Jesus's parables. Or like the accounts of David and Goliath. Or Jehoshaphat surrounded by the armies. Or Moses. Or Abraham.

And we have words – like the letters of Paul or directives from the prophets in the Old Testament.

I would like to take these three ways of "getting the point across" and analyze them a little bit.

First the pictures – the dreams or visions.

Obviously we aren't going to be giving our readers dreams or visions. Only God could do that.

What we are going to do is to paint pictures for them.

Look at an example.

When I say, "The girl drove up," you get a picture in your mind. You don't think of just a string of words, but you think of a girl driving up. Some may think of a car. Others may think of a motorcycle.

What if I said, "The girl drove up in a red car?" Haven't I communicated a clearer picture?

What if I said, “The girl drove up in a red convertible?”

Or, “The girl sped up in her red convertible?”

Or, “The girl sped up in her red convertible, her hair blowing in the breeze.”

Or, “The girl sped up in her red convertible, her long, jet black hair blowing in the breeze.”

In the last sentence you can see much more clearly the picture of the girl driving up. In fact, from the last sentence, you might even begin to imagine some characteristics of the girl. She might be reckless. Maybe likes to show off – driving so fast in her red convertible.

The point is that the picture you paint as a writer is what communicates the greatest. That’s what sticks with a person. The picture.

One way you can paint pictures as you write is to take a minute and imagine yourself in a scene.

What do you see?

Hear?

Smell?

Taste?

What are your emotions at the moment?

I promised that I would share some of my own techniques, so here goes.

When I was writing the biography of Bishop Hardy Coleman, I would spend some time with him and his wife. He would share about his early life growing up in the deep, segregated south.

Then I would go home and sit, thinking and picturing what the scene would be. After a clear picture was formed in my mind, I would begin to write. I would try to paint the picture of the scene.

Just as an example, in one chapter I wanted to share about Bishop Coleman’s life as a young adult. Married and with a family, he preached, but also worked in fields picking cotton to support his family.

I could have said it like I just did, but that wouldn’t grab the imagination very much.

So this is what I wrote.

If you were to drive down a certain dirt road in Benton County, Mississippi in the summer of 1951, you would encounter some interesting sights. Sure, the car in front of you would inhibit part of your view because of the dust it stirred up, and your rear view mirror would signify that you were making your own cloudy contribution. That's just the way it was, driving on the roads of Benton County.

Yet between the dusty episodes, you would see life - and lots of it, out in the cotton fields you would pass. Old and young, male and female, people would be out picking the cotton, and bringing in the provision for their families. Some would be mopping their brows from the heat of the sun. Others would be fanning away the sweat bees which liked to swarm around the workers.

From there I would go on to point out Bishop Coleman and his family among the workers.

Do you see what I mean?

If you can get your readers to see a picture, they will understand more of what you are talking about. And the picture can stick with them longer.

We have talked earlier about writing every day for at least 20 minutes. These are good times to practice the art of painting pictures. You can grow in your ability to do this as you practice.

One way to do this is in your busy life – wherever you happen to be, imagine lessons you could learn from the scene you are in.

I'll give an example.

Last year I needed to get a new passport before our trip to Ukraine.

So I went to the Passport office where there was a long, very slow line. But I had to get this done, so I got in the line.

After a few minutes of nervously tapping my foot, I realized I could make use of this time. I had just read an article by John Carlton which said that we should try to imagine what we would write in the every day scenes like this. What does this scene represent? What are some lessons we could learn from just such a moment?

Though I had no paper in hand, I began to imagine in my mind what value I could pull from the moment. And after I left, I wrote a blog post and an email about the time spent in the line.

The people closest to me in line were a young professional couple with a small child. They were from Mexico City, and were obtaining a passport for their child so that they could go and visit their relatives in Mexico.

Then there was a dignified lady from India. She proudly shared with me that her two sons were medical doctors. She then began to tell me about how she had raised her sons to be very diligent with their school work. She had very strict rules for their after school behavior – and was eager to share with me her ideas on parenting.

You can see that in that setting there were many things I could have been inspired to write about.

At that moment my mind was on our upcoming trip and the financial suffering of our Ukrainian friends after decades of Communist control. I also had in mind the money our organization had just sent to India for some poverty stricken school children.

So I wrote about how every culture – including ours – had such a dichotomy of lifestyles. There were the rich, educated and prosperous like these people I had just met. But there were also the poor, almost forgotten ones. And the post went on from there.

There were many ideas which could have sprung from that encounter.

You get the point I'm trying to make.

When you are standing in a grocery line, or waiting in a carpool line, or shopping at a mall, or working in your office...take a moment to observe.

Who are these people?

What do they want in life?

What would you say to them if you had liberty to speak?

When you begin to practice this, you may be surprised. You might even find some “picture lessons” for your book. At the very least, you will grow in your ability to blend your writing and your pictures of every day life. And such pictures will certainly make more of an impact than just the facts.

So let's move on to stories.

From the stories recorded in the Bible to Aesop's Fables, it's very clear that stories can have a greater significance than words alone.

In his book, *Intentional Living*, John C. Maxwell says it like this...

Everyone loves a good story – we always have. Stories tell us who we are They...

- *Inspire us*

- *Connect with us*
- *Animate our reasoning process*
- *Give us permission to act*
- *Fire our emotions*
- *Give us pictures of who we aspire to be*

Stories **are** us....

And then he goes on to say...

As a communicator I spend a good portion of my days sharing stories. People don't care a lot about cold hard facts. They don't want to look at pie charts. They want excitement. They like drama. They care about pictures. They want to laugh. They want to see and feel what happened. Statistics don't inspire people to do great things. Stories do.

Intentional living, John C. Maxwell, 2015, Hachette Book Group

So how do we find stories? How do we know which ones are right for our audience?

Well, one of the practices we are establishing is a quiet time every day. Listening to God. During those moments, we can expect to hear new ideas. As we do this, we may be surprised at how He will remind us of stories we heard many years ago – or maybe even episodes in our own lives – which will emphasize the points we are making.

Think about the story of David and Goliath in the Bible. How many sermons have you heard which included this story. And how many lessons have been taught?

1. How the young boy had more faith in God than all the armies of Israel
2. How the fact that David praised and sang songs to God increased his faith so that he was ready for the moment.
3. How David's encounters with a lion and a bear while guarding the sheep gave him confidence that he could kill Goliath.
4. How David relied on his own proven armor and not Saul's armor.
5. How David saw that the giant was not taunting just the people but God Himself.
6. How David knew that his small slingshot with God was greater than the sword, spear, and shield of Goliath.

There are many more principles which have been shared using this story.

One of the main things about stories is that even more than with pictures, your audience is captivated. They want to know how it turns out. Once the story has been told, readers can remember it long after they remember other things you may have said. The impact is lasting.

Often your stories can be personal memories. Scenes from your own life. Encounters you have had with people – even your family.

I'll give you an example from my book *Forever Upward*.

The point I was attempting to make was that taking Bible verses out of context can sometimes hamper their true meaning. So I used a personal story.

We live in the Atlanta area now, but this episode was taken from a time when we lived in Mississippi.

While in the second grade, my granddaughter, Lauren, was required to give a report on the state of her choice. (Needless to say, we were delighted when our Atlanta-born granddaughter chose our state, Mississippi).

Her accompanying prop was a poster with information about the state. Right in the center of the poster was a tiny dot with the words, "Blue Mountain." (Our town) She had cut the dot and the words from a map of Mississippi. When I saw the tiny dot and words, I couldn't help but smile.

There was no point of reference to the town. Then I went on to say that this reminded me of the way people will pull Bible verses out of context and put them on their refrigerator. Often doing this would skew the true meaning of the verse.

I went on to talk about the "satellite approach," like you see in spy movies. The big picture is what you see first, and then there is the greater focusing for detail.

The point is that any episodes from your life or from stories you have heard in the past can be used to enhance your writing.

Of course, the many accounts in the Bible give us a wealth of material for our books.

Besides your own repertoire, you may find stories on the internet. There are many books which are full of stories for speakers or writers. You can find some in your library or at bookstores.

A good place to look might be books written for toastmasters. Speakers know that good stories will get better attention than "just the facts."

The point here is that "just the facts" is not enough to leave a lasting impression on your readers.

Third is Words. Just words.

I had the most interesting thing happen to me while writing the transcript for this webinar.

Just as I awoke one morning, thoughts about communication started flooding my mind. I knew that they were from God, so I began to write them down.

The thoughts were like this...

What are we doing when we write or speak to each other? We are communicating our ideas and attempting to transfer them to another person. We want to share our thoughts.

Then the whole idea of language began to flow through my mind. We use our alphabet – with letters assembled in a certain way – and sounds assembled in a certain way – to transfer our thoughts and ideas to another person.

The language is like a code. When someone knows the “code,” they can understand what the other is saying. If someone doesn’t know the code, they won’t be able to understand the ideas you are attempting to transfer to them.

When we grow up speaking a certain language, the code comes so naturally to us that we don’t even realize that we are deciphering it. Yet it is still a code.

If we don’t know the Russian code –

or the Chinese code – we won’t be able to grab the thoughts being communicated in those languages. If we are in a group of people speaking a different language, the others may laugh or applaud when they hear others speak. But we don’t. We don’t know their code. We must have someone interpret for us.

When we drill down a little deeper with this thought we realize that the same applies to vocabulary. If we speak with words which are unfamiliar to our audience, we miss the mark. We haven’t communicated properly.

To explain what I mean, let me share a funny family story.

My grandfather was a rural mail carrier in a South Georgia farming community. This was about a hundred years ago, and there were lots of farm workers who hadn’t gone to school.

Almost every day, my grandfather would find someone standing by their mailbox when he came by. They would want him to write an order or a letter for them. So he would do it.

One day a young man was standing beside his mailbox waiting. Pap-pa said, “What can I do for you, Joe?”

Joe’s reply, “I want you to write a letter to my girlfriend.”

“Okay, Joe. What do you want me to say?,” asked Pap-pa, as he pulled out paper and pencil.

“Well, I don’t really care what you say.” said Joe.

“But use ‘consequences.’ I think that’s a pretty word.”

That’s what many first time writers do. They think in terms of words more than thoughts. And it really gets overwhelming.

When we try to impress others just by using a big vocabulary, we do just as Joe was doing. We miss the mark completely. The readers may or may not be impressed, but we definitely fail to communicate.

Now if you are writing for an academic audience, you will use vocabulary appropriate there. The point is when you write, you are sending a code (words) which the readers need to know how to decipher. The appropriate vocabulary is the one which will best suit your audience.

You are not just writing words, you are conveying thoughts from your mind to theirs. So you want to use the best means possible when doing this.

As I said, this idea that good writing is just using a big vocabulary is a common pitfall for first time writers. But actually, it should be a relief to know that your goal is not to impress everyone. Your goal is to transfer your ideas to another. And using the language they are familiar with is the best way to do that.

Now let’s include a caveat here.

When we talk about a suitable vocabulary, we don’t mean that you use the same words over and over until readers go to sleep.

I have included a couple of PDF’s of action words and power words.

These are common words, but ones which have more impact. When you use common words which invoke emotions and show action, you convey your meaning with power.

That’s really our goal. We want to convey our thoughts with power and emotional involvement.

One of the writer’s best tools is the Thesaurus. You can go to [Thesaurus.com](https://thesaurus.com) and plug in a word you seem to be using too much. There will be a list of words which you can use instead. Words which mean the same.

Just to keep your message interesting.

So let’s recap:

Instead of just thinking in terms of the words, let's think in terms of the thoughts and messages we want to leave with our audience.

Thus using word pictures,

stories, anecdotes, and

Meaningful language can help us to convey what we want in the most impactful way.

That is our aim.

Powerful, impactful, even life-changing messages.

That's it for this time. See you soon.