



## **AGENTS FOR CHANGE**

Dr. Paul Borden, Executive Minister, HTB  
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Everyone enjoys a well-told story. That is why preachers must change your illustrations if you want to preach a sermon over again. Everyone remembers the stories. From the time we were children and asked our parents to read us a story until as adults we flock to movies that are produced well, we enjoy **good stories**. Stories keep our attention and cause the time to pass quickly. Understanding how stories are created causes us to know why this is true.

All good stories create **disequilibrium**. The hero or heroine is in trouble and it seems as though the crisis will be too great for them to survive or at the least to maintain their hero status. However, at some point, usually near the end of the story, there is a reversal and the story ends well with the hero succeeding. The story then concludes with a resolution of how and why the events occurred as they did. These three elements, disequilibrium, reversal and resolution, are the foundational elements of all good stories.

I have been impressed lately by how the elements of a good story are the same elements that are essential in order to lead change. **Change** is usually required because the present situation is unacceptable, at least to the change agent. Therefore the change agent begins to create **a sense of urgency**. The purpose of creating urgency is to create a sense of disequilibrium within those experiencing the status quo. Creating urgency well causes people to become dissatisfied intellectually, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually with the current scene. When done with excellence, urgency creates so much discomfort with present reality that people find it highly unacceptable.

Haggai the prophet created urgency well (*Haggai 1:5-6*). He describes how the people worked hard and labored long only to see their efforts produce futility. The people of Israel were living a reality that was an exercise in frustration. Haggai, as a change agent, comes along and



articulates what is happening in order to create a higher level of frustration. This new level of frustration created such a sense of urgency to act, that the people began to change both their attitudes and behaviors.

Urgency is like disequilibrium in a story. In stories, disequilibrium causes the listeners to want to see something different and new happen. Urgency causes people to want to see their reality change because if the present reality is not changed it will be a tragedy. We all want stories that end well, which means comedy is always preferable to tragedy. So, too, we want change when the here and now is unacceptable.

**Vision** is like reversal in a story. It is a picture of what life can be like. It means seeing a better tomorrow in which reality will be a far better option than the current unacceptable present. This is why *good leaders always create urgency before they cast vision*. They want the change to be a choice between a better future and an unpleasant now. Without such a choice people are neither attracted to change nor open to pursuing it with willingness and vigor.

A well-planned strategy to move people from where they are to where the vision will take them is like resolution. It is a way of actually implementing hope as the strategy is presented, adopted and then developed. If people are motivated to change, they want to know what to do and how to do it, and they are open to direction in how to act. Well thought-out "how" strategies include specific tactics that, when adopted, help people see the vision begin to take place and become a new reality. Good strategies and tactics always allow for flexibility because God wants us to start moving and then, in great wisdom, does more than we can ask or think.

Excellent change agents function like good storytellers. You always start with urgency and disequilibrium, then move to vision and reversal in order to arrive at strategies and resolution.