

Dear Walt,

Now that the Christmas season is over, we can return to my Springsteen letter. I'm glad you liked the connection between risk and reputation, Walt. Risks put our reputations on the line. This is scary because our reputations define who we are and what we want to be remembered for. Here's a biblical example that I've been thinking about.

King David could've been remembered for several accomplishments -- Goliath's killer, a man after God's heart, or Israel's greatest King. On his deathbed, David made a simple statement. He wanted to be remembered as "Israel's singer of songs" (2 Samuel 23:1).

This warrior-king measured his reputation not in military conquests but in the songs composed and sung for his God. David epitomized a leader as a poet. We both love the graphic arts, Walt, but we have to admire how poets empower words to create images. When we think like poets, words become allies for artful disciplinmaking.

What's it mean to think like a poet? Theologian Walter Brueggemann writes, "By poetry, I do not mean rhyme, rhythm, or meter, but language that moves like [Roger Clemens'] fast ball, that jumps at the right moment, that breaks open old worlds with surprise, abrasion, and place." We become poets when our words crack and pop like a baseball hitting a catcher's glove. Our artfulness in selecting and stringing words together will entice people to put risk and romance into their faiths.

"Poems can change an experience by imaginatively naming or extending a feeling or thought" and helps us "rediscover the bright freshness of creation," writes Frances Mayes. Eugene Peterson said it well, "Poetry is language used with personal intensity. It is not decorative speech. Poets use words to drag us into the depths of reality. A poet grabs for the jugular."

Words skillfully used should capture all of our senses. Here's some insight from Flannery O'Connor: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see."

Jesus was a master at making us, hear, feel, and see in new ways. Though He didn't use rhyme or meter, Jesus' language jumped at the right moment and broke open worlds of meaning for his listeners.

Our Lord shocked people with words. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:53) Talk about grabbing the jugular! "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." (Matthew 7:15) Combining sheep and wolves is a masterful wordplay of contradictory images. I wish I could teach like this.

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How can artful disciplinmakers employ the power of words? We can start by picturing listeners' minds as art galleries. "The human mind is not, as philosophers would have you think, a debating hall but a picture gallery," writes Warren Wiersbe. This picture gallery should be hung with the finest of paintings.

We hang word-pictures in the galleries of people's minds by using metaphors and analogies. The Holy Spirit prefers analogies, over definitions, to communicate truth. Consider these sayings of Jesus. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed." The Kingdom is like a "mustard seed" or "yeast." We can construct analogies by this simple formula, "(Something) is like (something else)."

My friend John Ed is a master at analogies and metaphors. Here's some of his best.

- We think evangelism is like playing the child's playground game of red rover, red rover.
- Getting a handle on this truth is like picking up a bushel of Jell-O without the basket.
- Trying to live the Christian life in the flesh is like holding down ping pong balls in the bathtub. No matter how hard we try, new areas just keep popping up!

I wish writing and teaching this way was easy. Discipline is the difference between ministering in an artful way and a mechanical way. We must become connoisseurs of words, skillfully

searching, sampling, and savoring the best ones.

I collect good words by keeping a poetry journal. Since I'm a beginner at artfully using words, I need the inspiration of the masters. These snippets of memorable lines, recorded in my small leather journal, become my tutors for writing.

I have to close with a rock and roll example, Walt. The scholar, poet, and literary critic Christopher Ricks writes, "If I were ever able to become a Christian it would be because of the human substantiation that is to be heard in many a poem by George Herbert. And in many a song by [Bob] Dylan." The writings of the 18th century Christian poet George Herbert, and a 21st century enigmatic folk singer, so captures the human condition that the atheist Ricks is compelled to consider Christianity. Words have power.

I know this letter's been a meandering journey. That's the fun of thinking like a poet. One last analogy before I run off to my next appointment. The artful use of words is like composing a song. Words create melodies that gently linger in minds after the concert is over.

From one artful disciplinmaker to another,

Rice

