

Leadership, Belief and Imagination

Childlike Belief:

Jesus said “unless you become as a little child you will not enter the kingdom.” Konstantin Stanislavski’s created a method for acting that is still today the cornerstone of the education of most professional actors. Nine volumes of his actors notebooks were written in Russia in 1930 and translated into English soon after.

In *An Actor’s Work*, Jean Benedetti translates two of these works. Stanislavski wrote *An Actor’s Work* in the form of a story. It is the story of an acting teacher training a group of students. The teacher’s name is Tortsov. Throughout the book he works to teach a group of students how to act.

Tortsov tells the story of a little girl who was acting as a mommy to illustrate the power of childlike imagination. A director asked a little girl to pretend she was a mommy whose baby had a tummy ache, and she needed to give it medicine. She performed her role excellently. Stanislavski related the incident that follows to explain in what sense the best actors become as little children:

There wasn’t a doll in the theatre props. In its place we took a piece of wood, wrapped it in a piece of beautiful, light material and gave it to the little girl. The child immediately accepted the piece of wood as her daughter and gave it her love. . . . At the end of the rehearsal she would not be separated from her daughter for anything. The props master was willing to give her the piece of wood but not the piece of material that was needed for that evening’s performance. A childhood tragedy ensued with wailing and weeping. This only stopped when it was suggested to the child that she change the beautiful, light material for a cheap, rough but warm cloth used for dusting. The child discovered that warmth was more useful for an upset stomach than the beauty and brightness of the material she already had, and willingly agreed to the swap” (Stanislavski, 155).

This child immediately accepted her role. She fully accepted that the piece of wood was her baby. By accepting things not as they were, but as they could be, she believed and acted powerfully on that belief. She protected her ‘child’ from the people trying to steal her blanket and refused to step out of the role she had taken on.

It is quite amazing how long children can concentrate on one object or one action. They like to stay in the same mood in their favourite character. The

illusion of real life which children establish in their play is so strong that it is difficult for them to get back to reality” (Stanislavski, 156).

As adults we are unlike children in one important aspect. We no longer willfully take on roles that are different from those that we have internalized. While a child may become a mother at a moment’s notice, most often an adult would half-heartedly pretend to be a mother if she is not, but she will not fully take on that role.

Activating our Imaginations; Engaging with the Holy Spirit

“What if” changes everything.

1. Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.

“What if” it is true, right now, in your life?

How would you believe and think?

How would you act?

2. Read 2 Peter 1.1-11.

What does it say about knowledge of God?

“What if” we develop this knowledge of God, according to this passage?

“What if” it is true?

How would you believe and think?

How would you act?

3. Stanislavski, 50-51:

“ ‘The secret of ‘if,’ as a stimulus, lies in the fact that it doesn’t speak about actual facts, of what is, but of what might be . . . ‘if’ . . . This word is not a statement, it’s a question to be answered. The actor must try to answer it.”

4. Hebrews 11.1:

“Now faith is the substance of things hope for, the conviction of things not seen.”

5. How do Stanislavski’s quote and Hebrews 11.1 relate?

Key idea: “What if” is a hypothesis that we can act on, not forcing ourselves:

p. 51 “ ‘ This is why *the step forward and the solution occurred without forcing or deception on my part.* The fact is I didn’t tell for certain there was a madman outside

the door. I didn't lie. On the contrary, the very use of the word 'if' was an overt recognition that I was merely introducing a hypothesis and that, in reality, there was no one outside the door. I just wanted you to tell me, honestly, what you would do if the story about the madman proved true. I didn't ask you to have delusions. I didn't force my own feelings on you, but gave you absolute freedom to experience whatever each of you would naturally 'experience' on your own. And you, for your part, you didn't force yourselves to accept my story about the madman as actual or real, but took it as a hypothesis. I didn't force you to believe the truth of this fictitious madman, you yourself freely accepted the possibility that such a thing might exist in real life."

The key to developing leadership imagination is to freely consider the possibilities that we discover. We cannot force ourselves to believe them. Instead, we play. We start consider "what if" this is true. What would we think in our specific situation? What would we believe in our situation? In response, how would we act in this situation? If we can play like this regularly, we will stimulate our imaginations and begin to see ourselves, our roles, our situations from God's perspectives. We have God's narrative, God's promises and cautions as the resources to begin our imagining.

Example:

Isaiah 53 is widely recognized as a prophecy of Jesus' death and resurrection and its results:

Is. 53:9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

Is. 53:10 But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

Is. 53:11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

Is. 53:12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

"What if" you considered the idea that Jesus will be satisfied with the results of his suffering because of how his suffering impacts your group?

What would that look like?

If that is true, how can you discover what you can do? [This is not an easy question]

Once you have discovered it, how can you plan and then implement it?

What will Jesus do when you do that?

Steps to See Ourselves as Leaders

1. What is our current role?
2. Who are we in our role?
3. Who is God in us in our role?
4. Who are we becoming in our role?

Steps to Encourage Belief God's Work in our Community.

1. Who are the individuals we serve?
2. Who is the group we serve?
3. What does God want to do in our community?
4. What do we want God to do in our community?
5. What steps and sequence can we take to facilitate God's work?

Stanislavski, Konstantin. *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*. New York: Routledge, 2008.