



# Work Stories

Parables about our Place in the World

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## **Introduction**

The point of parables is not to make things “crystal clear” but to force us to think. Parables do not just tell us *about* something, they are trying to *do something* to us. So, you must always be careful when you read a parable: just when you think the story is talking about someone or something else, you find out it is talking about you.

### 3 Companies

Once upon a time, there were 3 companies.

One company was founded by 5 greedy lawyers as a way to make money. Unfortunately, they discovered that the best way to make money is to work selflessly, serve each other and look out for the best interests of their clients. They did so, and were very successful.

The second company was founded by 5 people who called themselves “God’s People” and operated their company as a way to promote God’s reputation. Unfortunately, there were no products or services that any of them was good at or cared about. They did, however, make beautiful brochures.

The third company was founded by 5 young men who knew each other from playing football together in high school. They were all reasonably bright, liked working together and had a great idea for a good product that would serve people well and could be manufactured safely and cheaply. Despite being from the mid-west, they didn’t think often about God, but they did think a lot about what their customers needed. They crafted products of extremely high quality and offered them at fair prices, working hard and staying together for many years, serving their customers through good times and bad. On most days, they enjoyed it all and were well respected by customers and competitors alike..

**Which of these companies would you like to work for?**



## *The Rescue Shack - Revisited*

There is a famous preacher's story about a small band of people who lived near a dangerous coast. Their hearts of concern compelled them to watch and do what they could to pull survivors out of the sea after the frequent ship wrecks. Over time, the band started to stockpile materials - life vests, warm blankets, a small stove - and store them in a small shack, which also provided a little protection from the wind for themselves and the people they rescued from the cold waters.

As the story goes, this shack was expanded until it became more of a club house for the members of the emerging "rescuers club" and was slowly turned from its original purpose. Eventually, a small core who remembered the group's original purpose and fought to turn the club back, but the other members resisted and threw them out. Collecting a small bit of the necessary gear, this small core walked up the beach and started over, rescuing people from the sea but eventually expanding and building the same type of club. This pattern repeated itself until the coast was filled with very nice restaurants, villas, hotels and clubs. And at night, ships would wreck and people would need to be rescued from the sea.

That is how the preacher's story goes.

Until one day the latest band, jumping out of their newest hut, pulled from the sea a young man with dual degrees in Strategic Business Marketing and Public Policy. Grateful for the rescue, and naturally curious, the young man asked the group how they happened to be there that day and how they could be so ready and able to pitch in. As they began to tell the whole story - including their regrets about all the previous groups - he began to chuckle.

"And what do you hope to achieve different?" he asked them. "Isn't this hut here the start of the same pattern? Don't you know that the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing and each time expect a different result?" The group was puzzled. What was this man saying?

"Why do you even need a hut? Don't any of you live close enough?" (In fact, a few did live very close, right on the beach, close to that very spot.) "And couldn't the rest of you move closer?"

"And what about a lighthouse? It must cost something to build these shacks and then turn them into club houses, not to mention the very fine gear you have here." (They did indeed have the latest moisture-wicking underwear, very nice thermal outer gear and several very expensive camping stoves.) "Couldn't you use that money to build a lighthouse or fund a campaign to petition the government to do it?"

"And why hasn't anyone contacted the local ship captain's league or whoever it is that should know about these things. I bet you wouldn't have nearly the number of wrecks if you could get the word out."

**Can you guess what they did next?**



## *The Hostile Take-Over*

Once upon a time, there was a small but thriving internet company. They had excellent customer service, and the people generally liked working with each other.

One day, the company was taken over by a huge “consulting” company that was known for the harsh way it treated its employees and its “winner-take-all” approach to competition.

Many of the workers from the original internet company were immediately fired. Most of the rest were forced to more, and all were forced into new contracts that guaranteed lower pay, longer hours and no input into management decisions.

Most of the survivors from the original smaller company ducked their heads and were soon assimilated. They punched the clock, did just enough work to stay out of trouble and joined the constant stream of gossip and backstabbing.

A few, a very small few, from the original internet company got together and made a pact. Their new contracts wouldn't allow them to leave, but they promised not to buy into the harsh, new corporate culture. They made a promise to each other that they wouldn't let the quality of their customer service slip and that they would keep working together as a team.

At first, their efforts were barely noticed. But eventually, their extra effort, extra hours and quality products and services started attracting attention. It took time, and there were many “dark days,” but things throughout the company eventually began to change. Occasionally, folks the consulting company would be asked if they would like to “join the cause.” Over time, the whole company began to feel a little friendlier, and its sales grew.

One day, the board held a secret meeting. The small group of people at the heart of these changes had caught their attention. In a surprise announcement at a company-wide meeting, the old management team of the consulting company – the CEO, the CFO, the head of operations and all the VPs – were replaced by this small group from the original company. **They were given control of everything.**

