

November 7, 2020

Dear Saints in Christ Jesus,

Professor Erno Rubik didn't realize he was about to launch a worldwide phenomenon. He simply intended to use his homemade, three-dimensional teaching tool to communicate an engineering concept to his architectural class at the Budapest College of Applied Arts.

Rubik's contraption consisted of 26 wooden blocks held together by an inside pivot mechanism made of rubber bands. Each of the cube's six sides were uniquely colored, and the pivot apparatus allowed each side of the cube to twist independently thus interchanging the colors.

The purpose of the demonstration was to show how a prototype—made of individual pieces—could move independently without the whole structure falling apart.

It was a brilliant teaching aid and lecture ... but the lecture was completely lost.

That's because, as Professor Rubik demonstrated the horizontal and vertical movements of the cube—thus mixing the colors into disarray—he couldn't seem to reassemble the colored blocks back into their original six sides.

At first the class remained respectfully silent, and then followed with a few embarrassing laughs. Next came a handful of helpful prompts, followed by a room full of eager suggestions. The more engaged the students became with Rubik's colorful toy, the less concerned they were with the lecture.

With that innocent beginning in 1974, Rubik's Cube was ushered into pop culture. In fact, within the first two years of distribution, more than 200 million Cubes sold worldwide.

Soon *Scientific American* displayed a Cube on its cover. The New York Museum of Modern Art put a Rubik's Cube on exhibition. The #1, 2 and 4 on New York Times Best Seller List were books for solving Rubik's Cube—for good reason, too! After all, there are approximately 43 quintillion potential configurations to Rubik's Cube ... but only one solution.

Guinness Book of World Records began hosting official *Speedcubing Contests* to clock the fastest times for solving a scrambled Cube. Are you ready?

- Fastest time to solve—3.47 seconds (that's not a typo!)
- Fastest one-handed solve—6.82 seconds
- Fastest solving using only toes and feet—15.56 seconds

- Fastest blindfold solving—15.50 seconds (which includes time to memorize the scrambled Cube, then solve the puzzle while blindfolded).

All this frenzy from a teacher's visual aid on architectural engineering. You have to wonder if any of those students can remember the lecture. Probably not. However, you can be sure they've told their kids and grandkids about the day Rubik's Cube was born.

The truth is, gimmicks work and novelty sells. Clever hipness awakes an audience even when (gulp!) the subject matter doesn't. As a result, we're all tempted to use those attention-getters ... even pastors do this in their sermons.

Don't get me wrong, appropriate illustrations and effective visual aids are not wrong.

- Noah had the largest visual aid in history—his Arc illustrated salvation.
- Moses' staff served as a visual aid to Pharaoh when it became a serpent—the message was, "Don't mess with my God!"
- Jeremiah preached while wearing an oxen yoke—the message was, "Your idolatry has led to captivity."
- While in Athens, Paul used a local visual aid—"You've built an altar devoted to an UNKNOWN GOD. Let me introduce you to Him."
- Jesus used visual aids constantly—a child sitting on His lap, a fishing net, a Roman coin, well water, an olive tree, a donkey, washing feet, and on and on.

However, here's the danger: when a pastor's illustrations dwarf the text, when the pastor's colorful cubes are all that's remembered, when the pastor's content is sacrificed on the altar of creativity, then they've sold our birthright for a bowl of pottage.

Nothing must take the spotlight away from God's living, active, two-edged sword. God's Word cuts deeper than any clever manmade toy. Scripture is a "hammer which shatters a rock!" It's simply irresistible. Our Bible is the most powerful weapon we have in our arsenal as we do battle with this world and culture. Hold it firmly. Handle it carefully. Declare it boldly and watch it work.

Blessings,

Pastor Lucero