

About the Author

Nick Fawcett was born in 1957. He studied Theology at Bristol University and Regent's Park College, Oxford. His early years of ministry were spent in Somerset and Lancashire, and from 1989 to 1996 he was Minister of Gas Green Baptist Church, Cheltenham. From November 1996 to June 1999 he served as Toc H Chaplain and Development Officer for Wales and the West of England.

He is now concentrating full time on his career as a writer, proof reader and indexer. His books to date are *No Ordinary Man* (1997), *Prayers for All Seasons* (1998) and *Are You Listening?* (1998), all published by Kevin Mayhew. He has also written the texts for the *Best Loved Melodies Choral Collection* (1999) and had four hymns chosen for inclusion in the Churches Together Millennium Hymn Book *New Start Hymns and Songs* (1999), both also published by Kevin Mayhew.

He lives with his wife, Deborah, and two young children, Samuel and Katie, in Wellington, Somerset.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

I will never forget the day at Bristol Baptist College when I received the orders of service prior to my first preaching engagement and saw leaping out at me two words: Children's Talk. Clearly this was viewed as an integral part of the service, but what exactly was expected of me, still less how I could deliver it, I had no idea. My experience in talking to children was, to say the least, limited, and there was little I had learned up to that point which had prepared me for the task. Had I but known it, no formal training was to be offered in this field anyway, the learning process essentially consisting of being thrown in at the deep end.

I squirm with embarrassment when I look back on some of the early 'children's talks' I delivered, the content simplistic if not downright patronising. Numerous congregations must have exercised enormous patience as slowly I developed my technique at their expense. Yet, strangely, the person who taught me more about the art of successful communication than anyone else was not a member of any one of these congregations, nor one of my college tutors, but an elocutionist I saw for a few brief sessions during my time at Bristol Baptist College. His advice consisted of three simple tips:

- always begin by asking a question or using an illustration which involves your audience in what you are saying;
- always end with a simple challenge or question which puts in a nutshell everything you have been trying to say;
- keep the middle short, simple and to the point.

In every address I have given since then I have kept that advice in mind, not following it slavishly but attempting to apply the essential principles whenever possible. They have stood me in good stead. While I have never considered myself a particularly gifted preacher, still less a natural communicator, the talks I have given throughout my ministry seem generally to have been well received. Why? Partly perhaps because my sermons were always short (by Baptist standards, anyway!), but most of all, I believe, because listeners could always find something to relate to.

Having said that, every talk is different. The style of a sermon is quite unlike that of a lecture – at least it should be! The style of a wedding address is nothing like that of a funeral oration. And the style of a children's talk – or family talk, as I prefer to call it – is totally different again. When young people are present in church you are immediately talking to a wide age-range, spanning two, three or even four generations. It is essential not to talk down to children, and equally important that adults get something more from the talk than a pleasant sense of indulgence. This is all the more important if my sus-

picion is correct that many adults actually prefer listening to a family-type talk than a sermon, the latter often pitched so far over their heads that their thoughts soon wander to such matters as the state of their Sunday lunch or yesterday's football results!

So what makes a successful family talk? There is no one answer to that, but for me the following are all vital ingredients:

- an element of fun
- appropriate visual aids
- 'audience' participation
- all-age relevance
- brief applications
- thorough preparation
- attractive presentation

Let me deal with each of these in turn.

Fun

With any audience a little light-heartedness goes a long way towards establishing a rapport. When talking to young people this becomes all the more essential, as there are so many other attractions in our society competing for their time. Too often I have attended services in which the 'talk to the children' is little more than a mini (or not so mini) sermon, and the ineffectiveness of this approach has been eloquently testified to by scarcely suppressed expressions of boredom. Not only do such talks fail to get the message across but, far worse, they effectively drive young people away from our churches.

Visual Aids

My own preference has always been to include some sort of visual aid in a talk, even if this is simply key words stuck to a board. Indeed, words and words games, as you will see, figure prominently throughout this book. It is a fact that what we see stays in our minds far longer than what we simply hear.

Audience Participation

Young people (and many older ones too) like to be involved in a 'learning process' rather than simply being talked to. Games, word-searches, quizzes and other such forms of participation offer an effective way of including the congregation in what you are saying. We need to promote an atmosphere in which people feel part of what is going on.

All-Age Relevance

As I have said already, many adults are actually far more receptive to a talk geared towards a younger audience than they are to a sermon.

Many also enjoy participation as much as children, if not more so! Even if this were not the case, we owe it to any congregation to ensure that a talk is able both to stimulate and challenge.

Brief Applications

I have always believed that the secret of a successful family talk is to keep the application – the serious bit at the end – as short and simple as possible. Ideally, the message you are looking to put across (and this ought to be *one* message, not several) should speak for itself through the illustrations and visual aids you use, though some expansion of what this means is usually necessary. Overdo the application and you will pay the price. Which of us hasn't witnessed the sudden glazed looks the moment the 'religious' part of a talk is reached. Whatever you do, don't try and ram the point home; if you haven't made the point through the fun part of your talk, you won't make it afterwards.

Thorough Preparation

There is no getting away from it: talking to young people takes time. There were many occasions during my ministry when I spent longer preparing a single family talk (even one lasting a mere five minutes) than two full-length sermons. In this book I have attempted to do most of the spadework for you through suggesting ideas and ways of presenting these, but to deliver most of the talks you will still need to spend some time in preparation. Don't be put off by this. The effort may occasionally seem out of proportion to the time taken up by the talk during the service, but I believe the results will more than justify it. What you put in, you will get out.

Attractive Presentation

In this sophisticated age, young people as much as adults are used to slick, glossy and professional presentations. While we cannot emulate these, it is important for visual material to be as clear and well-presented as possible. The advent of the home computer makes this far easier to achieve than it once was, as well as saving huge amounts of time. While material can be written out by hand (for many of these talks I did just that), I would strongly recommend the use of a PC word-processing package if possible.

When it comes to displaying material, my own preference, arrived at after several years of trial and error, is to use a magnetic white-board in conjunction with magnetic tape (available through most office stationery suppliers), with the back-up of an second white-board (magnetic or otherwise) and blutack. You will also need easels for these, as light and portable as possible. A supply of thick coloured marker pens (in washable and permanent ink) is a must for many

talks, as is a copious supply of thin card and/or paper. Several of the talks could be delivered using an overhead projector and screen if this is preferred to board and easel. Adapt to your available resources.

On a purely practical note, make use of a radio microphone if this is available. Family talks often involve a degree of movement, and it is all too easy to stray from a standing microphone so that you become inaudible, or, worse still, to trip headlong over the wires of a halter neck model! (The younger members of the congregation will delight in this, but for you it can prove embarrassing and even dangerous.)

The talks in this collection vary in length. Some are suited to a brief slot within a service, to be followed later by a sermon (ideally on the same theme). Others are full-length talks designed to replace the sermon in family services. Most can very simply be shortened or lengthened according to your need.

Each talk is set out according to a basic framework:

- a suggested Bible passage which should normally be read publicly prior to the talk
- a statement of the aim of the talk
- details of preparation needed beforehand
- the talk itself

This last section includes instructions relating, for example, to the use of illustrations, together with a suggested application of the talk. The talks will work best if, having read and digested these paragraphs, you present them in your own words. This is particularly true where the congregation is invited to respond, and developing and incorporating their ideas and answers into the talk will require a measure of ad-libbing on your part.

All of the talks in this book have been used in public worship during my time in the ministry. No doubt many are flawed in places and could be considerably improved – I do not offer them as examples of how it should be done, but rather as a resource which may be of help to you. Of all the comments received during my ministry, few have gratified me more than those when young people have referred in conversation to talks I delivered three, four, even five years back. Whether they remembered the point I had been making I cannot say, but whatever else they had enjoyed being in church and carried away positive associations of their time there. That in itself was always sufficient motivation to spend further time and energy devoted to ‘getting it across’.

Nick Fawcett

5 Books of the Bible

Reading

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

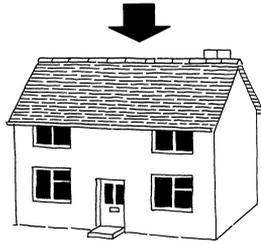
Aim

To get across the message that God speaks through the Bible – and that we need to read it!

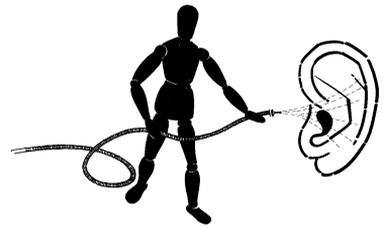
(This talk is suitable for any Sunday of the year, but is especially suited for Bible Sunday.)

Preparation

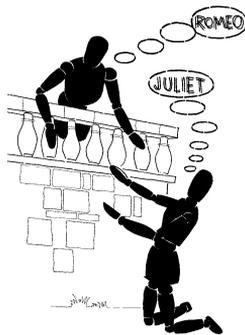
On large pieces of paper or card reproduce the following 'Catchphrase' clues. Larger versions of these pictures, suitable for photocopying, may be found in the Photocopy masters section on page 275.



Ruth



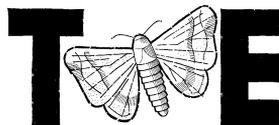
Hosea



Acts



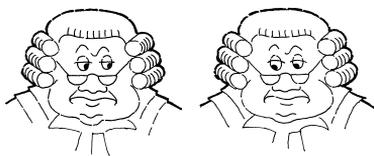
Exodus



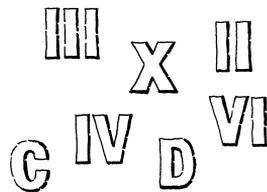
Timothy



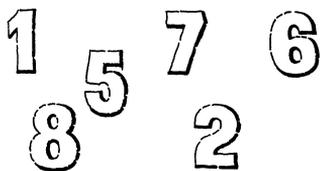
Amos



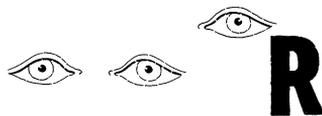
Judges



Romans



Numbers



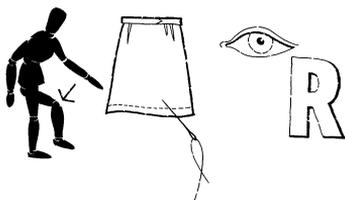
Isaiah

A STITCH IN TIME
SAVES NINE
TOO MANY COOKS
SPOIL THE BROTH

Proverbs



Lamentations



Nehemiah



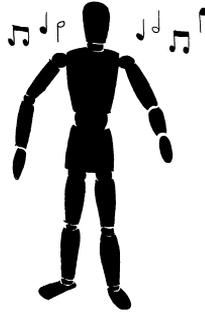
Esther

F EE BOTHAM
ST JOHN
WRIGHT
McCASKELL

Ephesians



1 Peter



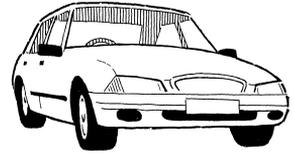
Song of Songs



Nahum

CHARLES I
HENRY VIII

2 Kings



Micah

Personalise this picture so that it resembles your own car by putting in your number plate, colour, you driving, etc.

You will also need to prepare a sheet with the answers, which you can reveal one at a time, making sure that the bold letters line up vertically, as shown below, so that the message can be read. (On the right-hand side are explanations of the answers which you may like to use to give clues where necessary.)

RUTH	(Roof)
HOS EA	(Hose, ear)
ACTS	(Romeo and Juliet)
EXODUS	(Exit)
TIMOTHY	(T, moth, E)
AMOS	(A rolling stone gathers no moss)
JUDGES	(Judges)
ROMANS	(Roman numerals)
NUMBERS	(Numbers)
ISAIAH	(Eyes, eye, R)
PROVERBS	(A stitch in time, etc.)
LAMENTATIONS	(Crying)
NEHEMIAH	(Knee, hem, eye, R)
ESTHER	(S, stir)
EPHESIANS	(F, Es, Ians)
1 PETER	(1p, eater)
SONG OF SONGS	(Singing)
NAHUM	(Neigh, hum)
2 KINGS	(Two kings)
MICAH	(My car)

Talk

Begin by asking the congregation how many books there are in the Bible (66), how many in the Old Testament (39), and how many in the New Testament (27). Explain that you have chosen twenty books for them to identify from your 'Catchphrase' drawings.

When all the answers have been revealed, explain that there is a serious message in all this and ask if anyone has spotted it – 'Read your Bible through'.

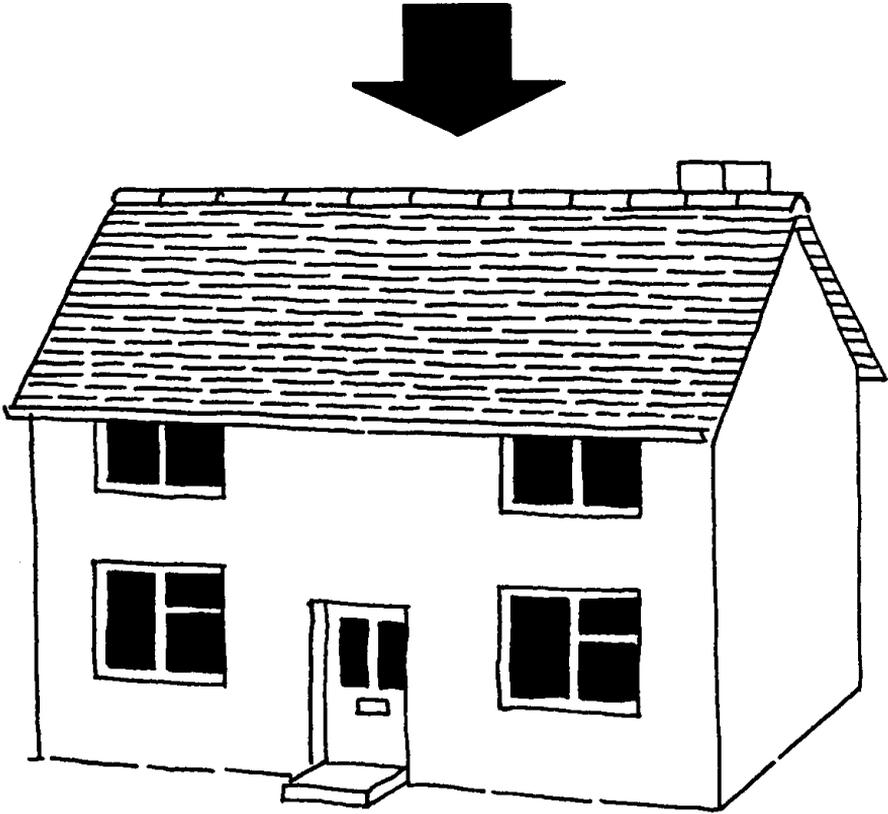
These are just some of the books of the Bible, but, as we were reminded earlier, there are 66 books in all. How many of these could they name? And, more important, how many have they read?

Reading the Bible isn't always easy, especially some of the lesser known books in it, and there will be times, as with the clues above, when we spend time wondering just what a particular passage means. We need help, advice and support if we are to get the most out of our Bibles. But as Christians we believe the Bible is a record not only of the way God has spoken to his people in times past, but his word to us now; a book which has a message for everybody and every part of our lives; a book which opens the way to knowing God and living life as he wants us to live it.

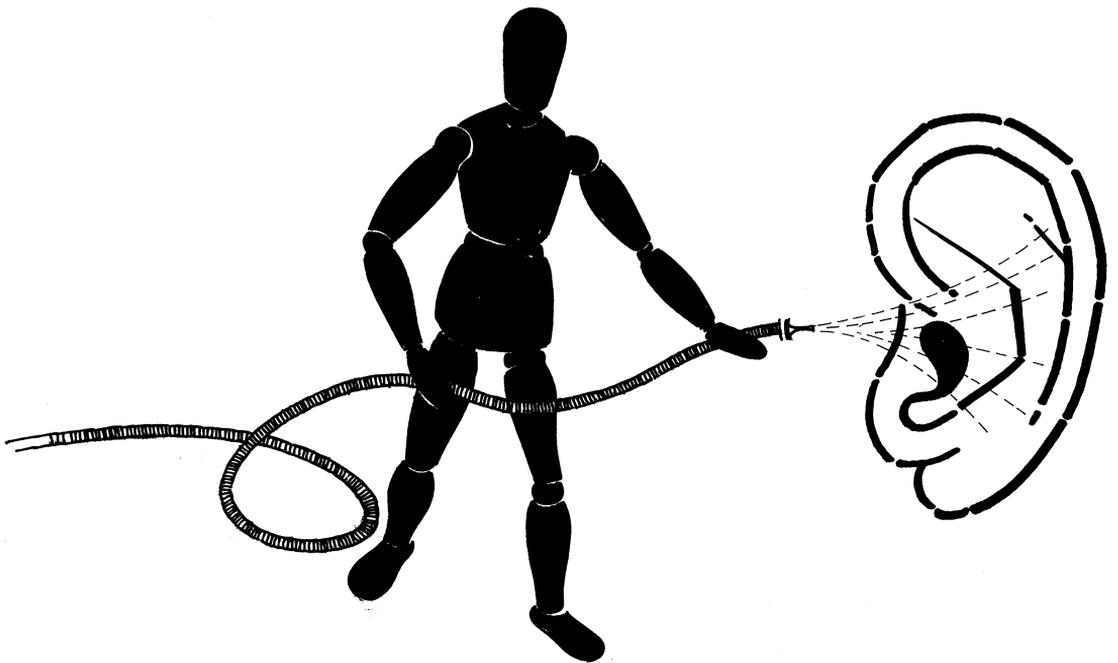
It's true that the Bible can be hard to understand, but if we make time to study it we will find the effort more than worth it, for we will discover God speaking his word to us!

PHOTOCOPY MASTERS

1. Ruth



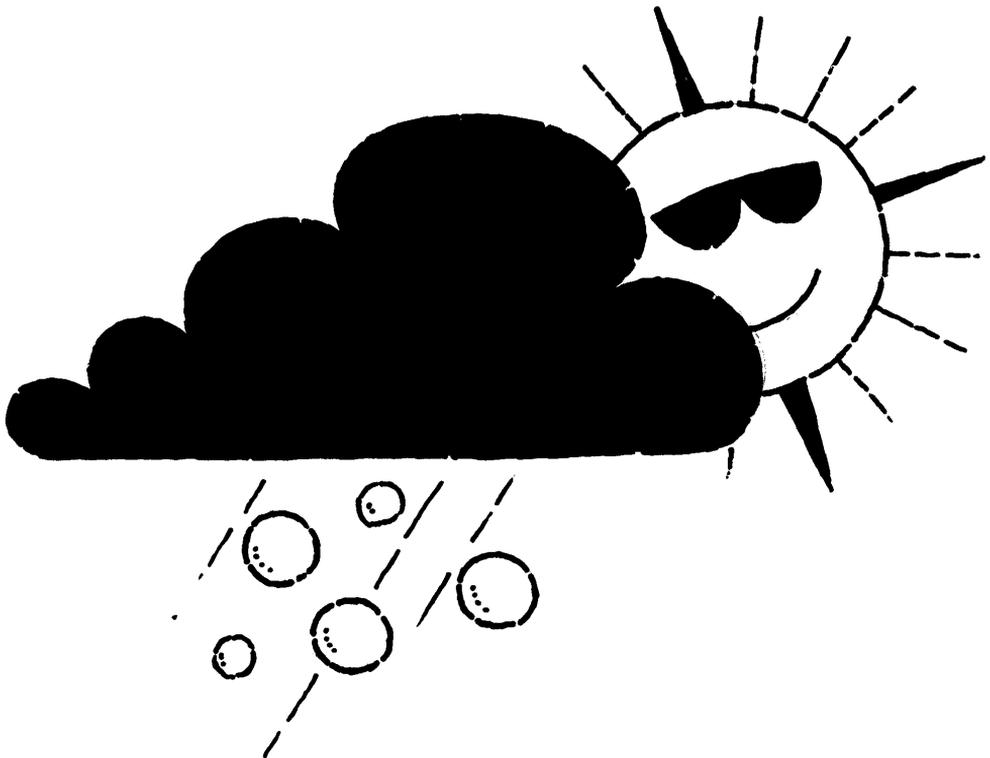
2. Hosea



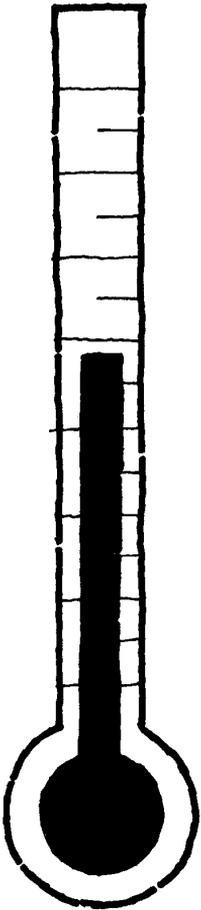
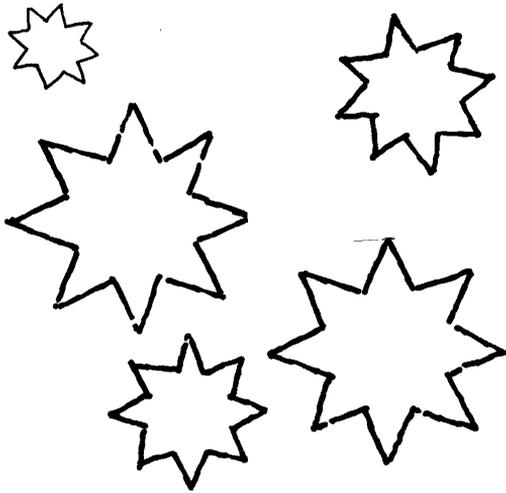
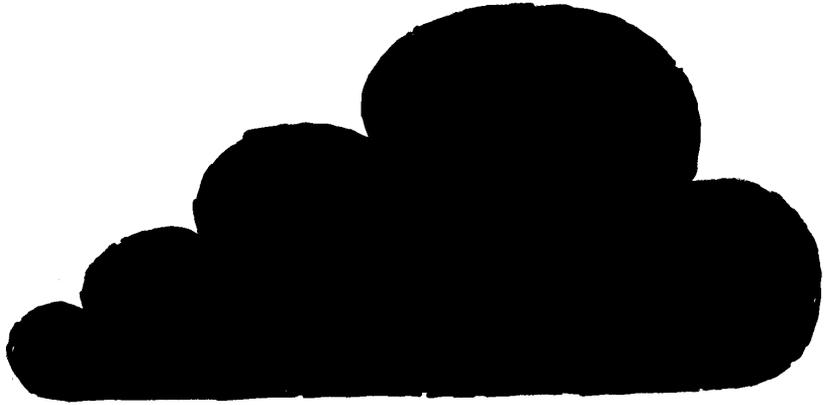
3. Rain



4. Hail

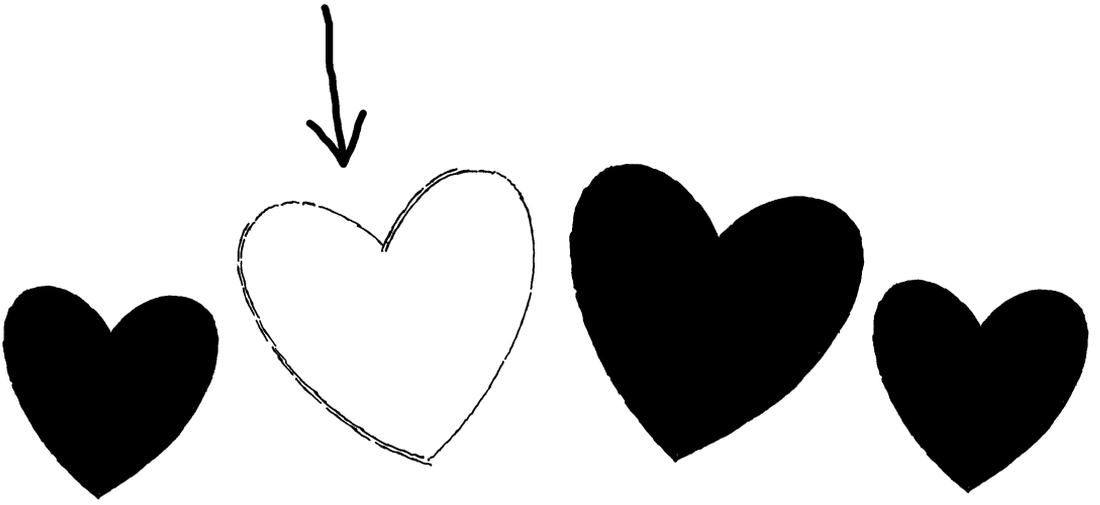


5. Snow

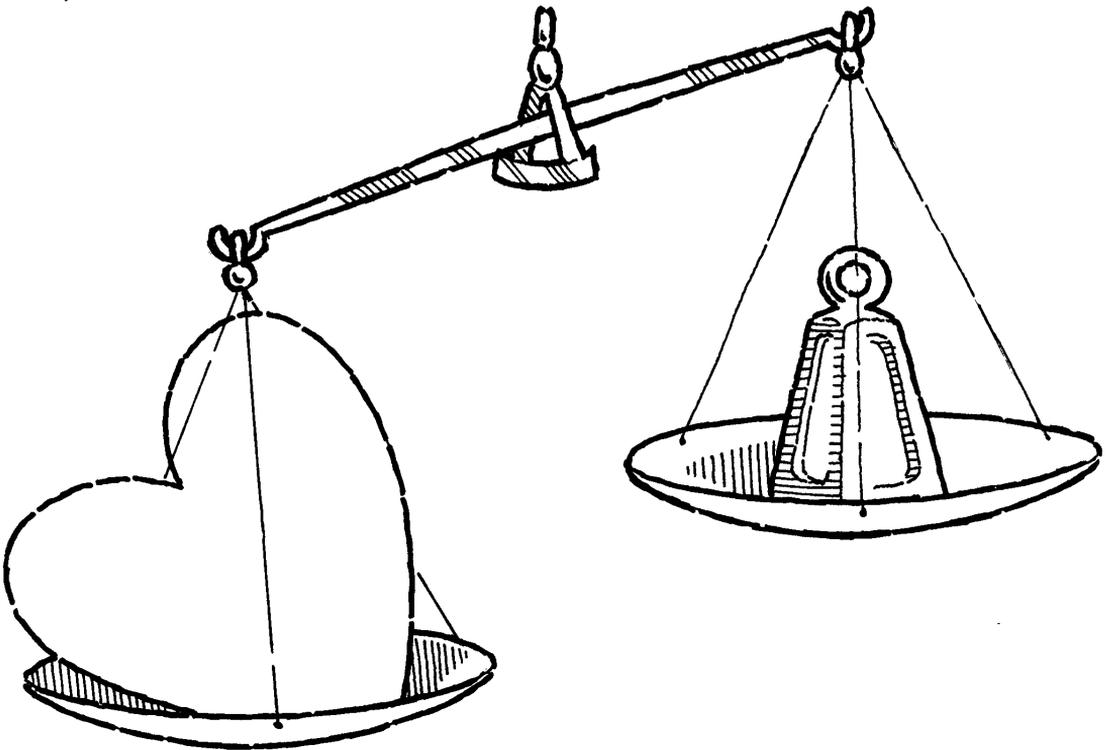


6. Temperature

3. Faint-hearted



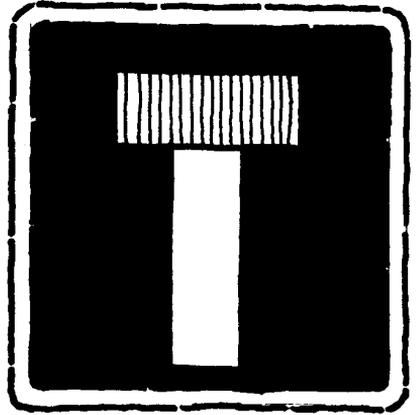
4. Heavy heart



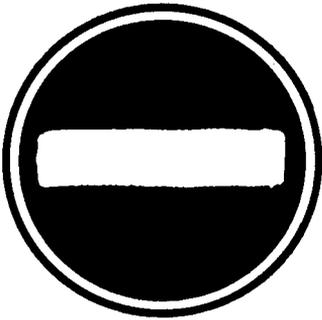
Roundabout



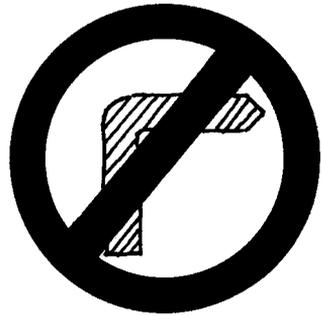
Dead end



No entry



No right turn



No U-turn



One way

