



Bible Teaching in Missional Perspective

Sample

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Unit 8. Teaching the Bible through storytelling

Reflection

From what you have seen so far, how could storytelling go wrong? What are some pitfalls to avoid?

Telling a meaningful story

The aim of Bible storying is not to entertain. Nor is it simply to inform. The aim is to transform.

If you are telling a story as a one-off then you may want to give the story significance (interpret the story) by telling it in a wider context. Set it in the context of the Bible story as a whole with a few short lines before or after. For example:

God made a world of plenty and provision. He provided fruit of every kind for humanity. But humanity rejected God. Human greed has made the world a place of scarcity and hunger. Did God leave it like that? No, he sent his own Son, Jesus, on a rescue mission. On one occasion Jesus spent the whole day teaching 5,000 people ... What Jesus did was a picture of God's coming new world — a world without hunger or pain. Jesus invites us all to join in God's great coming feast.

Or bring the story up-to-date by seeing how the same struggles or themes continue in your own setting. In other words, integrate the Bible story with our stories by adding your story or our story as the next 'chapter'. Or consider starting with an introduction that sets the audience up to look for certain meanings in the story. ("Have you ever been afraid? What did you do? Imagine you were facing a den of hungry lions.")

Consider ending with some discussion questions. ("When have you faced a similar challenge? How do you think they felt? How would you have reacted? What does this story show us about God?")

Consider integrating the Bible story with our stories through questions or by adding your story or our story as the next 'chapter'.

A storytelling model: recall, retell, reflect

A 'recall, retell, reflect' model offers a simple, reproducible approach to Bible storytelling that can be used both *ad hoc* and systematically.

Rewrite

Rewrite the story. Keep close to the details in the biblical text. But consider:

- simplifying the story (removing details and names of less significant people and places)
- highlighting repetition, turning points, tension and eventual resolution
- your story should be about three minutes long

If you can, memorise the story so you can retell it without missing any key points.

Review

When you are telling a story as part of a story set or Bible book, begin each session by reviewing the previous story or stories: “Who can remember the story we did last time?”

After you have told the story:

Recall

Ask people, “When? Where? Who? What? Why? How?” This helps people to recall the story. It also allows you to explain cultural and textual issues (traditional exegesis and exposition).

Retell

Encourage people to retell the story. You could invite someone to retell the story with help from the group. You could invite people to tell the story in pairs, taking it in turns to tell a line of the story.

Reflect

Ask some ‘dialogue’ questions to reflect on what we see in the story and some implications for us.

Reflect questions

‘Recall’ questions will generally have limited right answers (“What did he do next?” “Where did this happen?”). Reflect questions (or dialogue questions) should be open questions that encourage discussion. They should invite people to interact with the story (rather than pushing them towards predetermined answers or principles). You should come up with some dialogue questions that are specific for each story. But here are some generic ones that can be used for many stories and when telling a story in an *ad hoc* situation without preparation.

- What questions do you have about the story?
- What do you find striking in the story?
- How do you think they felt?
- How would you have reacted?

- What do we learn about God in this story?
- What do we learn about human beings in this story?
- Can you see any similarities with other parts of the Bible story?
- Does anything in this story point to Jesus or show our need for Jesus?
- Are there any links to our stories?
- When have you faced a similar challenge?
- How are we like the people in the story?
- How does the story challenge or encourage you?
- How does the story help us see what it means to walk in God's ways?
- When might you tell this story to a Christian?
- When might you tell this story to an unbeliever?

Exercise

Write a three-minute story, bearing in the mind the guidelines in Unit 7 for maintaining the integrity of the story.

If possible, use the 'recall, retell, reflect' framework to teach the Bible using storytelling.

Afterwards, review the experience using these questions:

- What happened?
- What was the outcome?
- How was a storytelling approach received?
- What resistance, if any, did you find? What do you think lay behind this?
- Were some people more involved than usual? If so, what kind of people?
- How did storytelling change the dynamics of the group?

to become unsettled and challenged by it, then they have been touched in a place where facts fear to tread. It is a place so personal that it can spark an inner transformation.⁴⁴

Jesus often taught through stories, particularly parables. Jesus intended them to challenge the existing Jewish worldview and to provide an alternative picture of reality that Jesus called 'the kingdom of God' ... Stories are, actually, peculiarly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews. Where head-on attack would certainly fail, the parable hides the wisdom of the serpent behind the innocence of the dove, gaining entrance and favour which can then be used to change assumptions which the hearer would otherwise keep hidden away for safety.⁴⁵

In other words, we should not evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling simply in terms of whether people are able to articulate principles they have learned at the end of a session. That is not how stories work. They create new perspectives, new values, new sympathies. They involve us.

Watch

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6eLR9qSo3o&hl> 'The Impact of Storying'

Sample

⁴⁴ Miller, M., *Experiential Storytelling*, 37, 41

⁴⁵ Wright, N., T., *The New Testament and the People of God* (SPCK, 1996), 40