

# TIPS FOR BIBLE STORYTELLERS

Begin by telling the Bible story. One of the most difficult things for most Christian leaders and Bible teachers to do is to narrate a Bible story rather than preach or teach. One must make a conscious effort to change former habits in order to become a storyteller.

Most Christian leaders and Bible teachers are accustomed to dissecting Scripture and explaining each minute detail. A frog that has been dissected doesn't hop. A dissected story is no longer a living story.

## 1. Bible stories are organized to be understood orally

The Bible storyteller needs the conviction that Bible stories were told orally before they were written. Even the written story was recorded to be understood and remembered when read aloud. Bible stories are organized to be heard orally, in one setting, without interrupting it for explanation.

## 2. When telling a Bible Story, do not invent facts beyond those found in the biblical narrative

The Bible storyteller should not exaggerate and recreate the story by inventing facts, situations and events not found in the biblical narrative. The storyteller needs to be exact in order to not mislead the listener. Many story-listeners will not be familiar with the story, and they will not know what is embellished or what is factual.

## 3. The storyteller may need to include complementary facts to make the story understood by today's listeners

Many facts that the original listeners understood leave today's audience confused. The storyteller may remain true to the biblical narrative but include complementary facts to enable his listeners to better understand the Bible story. Examples:

1<sup>st</sup> The original listeners to the narrative of Jesus' birth would understand that an engaged Jewish couple had a legal commitment that could only be terminated by divorce. The engaged couple was called husband and wife even though the marriage ceremony which initiated the couple living together would only happen in the distant future. Today the couple would be called fiancées.

2<sup>nd</sup> Those who heard Jesus tell the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican who went to the Temple to pray (Lk 18:9-14) personally knew Pharisees and the Publicans. Today's listeners may not know who they were. It would be helpful to include the complementary facts that the Pharisees were respected spiritual leaders who were legalistic in following the religious traditions of their ancestors. The Publicans were corrupt Jewish tax collectors who became wealthy by overcharging their fellow citizens. They were despised and called traitors by fellow Jews.

Therefore, while the Bible storyteller should not exaggerate and make up facts not found in the biblical narrative, it may be necessary to include explanations not mentioned in the Bible that complement and clarify the story.

# TIPS FOR PREPARING TO TELL A BIBLE STORY

## ► 1<sup>ST</sup> TIP: PREPARE BY IDENTIFYING THE STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE STORY

The storyteller begins his preparation by identifying the structure of the story. *(In the Short Bible Storying Track, most of the structure has been identified and included at the beginning of each story.)*

STORY	STRUCTURE OF THE STORY
Story's Setting / Background . . .	<b>Background information:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key person(s),</li> <li>• Key-location(s),</li> <li>• Initial-situation (give background information)</li> </ul>
Story begins . . . . .	<b>Initial-problem</b>
<b>STORY</b> is told . . . . .	Sequence of events Key-repetition Key-attitudes Dialogue Problem(s)
Story ends . . . . .	<b>Final-situation</b>

### 1. Identify key-person(s)

Determine who are the chief characters in the Bible story. Stories are character-driven. Characters act, experience conflict and undertake the struggles in a story. The events in the story are generated by the key-character's predicaments. The storyteller must make his story-listeners see, hear, feel and know the key-character(s).

Bible stories present characters through action and dialogues, not through description. The storyteller should show, not tell. Instead of simply using abstract descriptive words, he should use concrete descriptive words. Instead of saying: "Jacob was a man without moral standards," show this characteristic by description of actions or dialogue. It would be better to say: "Jacob lied to his father in order to steal his brother's inheritance."

Dialogue can include internal dialogue, in which the character talks to himself. Also, the character's feelings and emotions of love,

hatred, anger, compassion, etc. are presented through dialogue and actions, not description.

### 2. Identify the key-location(s)

Identify the principal location where events took place. Listeners need a picture in their heads of the place where the specific events occurred. Develop the skill of describing locations with few details and few words.

### 3. Identify key-repetitions

Repetitions are made in biblical stories in order to emphasize truths, to build to a climax or to express strong emotions. The Bible passages that come before and after the story need to be examined to determine if the chosen story repeats words, themes, facts or ideas that are emphasized in the context of the story. Since repetitions are used to emphasize what is important, the storyteller needs to know what is emphasized through repetition.

#### 4. Identify key-attitudes expressed in the story

Stories express attitudes, feelings, values, and emotions. A story may express a positive or negative attitude. Resignation, cynicism, hostility, shock, horror, sorrow, pain, love, joy, surprise and wonder are some of the attitudes expressed through stories. The storyteller needs to determine the attitudes the Bible story expresses in order to help his listeners experience the desired emotions.

Characters have attitudes toward themselves, other characters, certain values, events and certain issues. A character's attitudes express opinions, points of view, and slants that a character takes toward other characters and events.

Bible stories use actions, descriptive words and dialogue to present the character's attitudes.

For example: the text in Genesis 4 says that Cain was very angry. Then it uses:

- Description: to say Cain's face was downcast.
- Dialogue: God asked Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?"
- Action: Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Review the Bible story and consider what attitude the storyteller desires to express with each event and with each character. Then include the concrete descriptions, actions and dialogues which express those attitudes.

#### 5. Identify the initial-situation of the Bible story

The initial-situation introduces the main characters and their historical setting. The initial-situation provides the listeners with the historical setting for the story, background information about the characters and previous events that will influence the characters'

actions. It also makes us aware of goals the characters desire to achieve.

In Bible stories, the initial-situation is usually found in the context of Scripture that comes before the text that contains the story.

#### 6. Identify the initial-problem

Stories are about characters, their struggles and their conflicts. A common characteristic found in stories is that some problem or need near the story's beginning disturbs the initial-situation. A problem appears in the form of a person or circumstances which interfere(s) with the key-character(s) achieving something that is important to him. Stories begin with a problem or need, which intensifies with a series of episodes until a final-situation is reached.

#### 7. Identify the final-situation of the story

After the initial-problem, there is a pattern of problems, conflicts and aborted attempts at resolution until there is a final result. Some stories have a positive ending, others a negative. The final-situation answers questions such as the following:

- How did the story end?
- How was the initial-problem solved after the key-character faced a crisis?
- What were the results of improper action taken in an attempt to resolve the key-crisis?
- What is the connection between the story's initial-problem and its final-situation?

The final-situation may be similar to or completely different from the initial one. Often a connection exists between the initial-problem and the final-situation.

When telling Bible stories in chronological order, the final-situation of one story becomes the initial-situation of the next story.

## ► 2<sup>ND</sup> TIP: PREPARE YOURSELF BY LEARNING THE STORY

### 1. The storyteller should read and reread the Bible story daily for several days before telling the story

The storyteller should read the story in the Scriptures on a daily basis for at least a week before telling the story. It is helpful to read the story in different Bible translations.

Also, he should review on a daily basis the structure of the story.

### 2. The storyteller should avoid memorizing the story

The act of memorizing the story instills the fear of forgetting it. Also, the memorized story makes the listeners uneasy.

The storyteller needs to tell the story in his own words while being faithful to the facts recorded in the Bible.

### 3. The storyteller may find it helpful to memorize a few key parts of the story

Do not memorize the entire story. However, it is helpful to memorize:

- The beginning
- The ending
- Repeated phrases
- Lists contained within the story

### 4. Think and rethink the story before telling it

The storyteller uses his imagination in order to understand what happened and feel the emotions of the story, but do not reinvent what happened!

The storyteller should rethink the story by using his imagination. He needs to use his imagination to experience the story with his all his senses: the sights, the sounds, the smells, the tastes, the feelings and the emotions.

The storyteller should picture the story taking place in his mind. He should work at dreaming the story; similar to creating a movie

of the story and playing it on the screen of his mind.

The storyteller should rethink the story, using his imagination to make a connection between the biblical narrative and his own experiences. Making a connection between one's own experience and the biblical event helps one experience the proper emotions when telling the narrative.

### 5. Make a story-map using visual symbols

On a sheet of paper, represent each event of the story with a stick line drawing or some other kind of simple drawings. Mapping out the Bible story using stick line drawings is one of the best tools to help a storyteller visualize and remember it. A story-map is also known as a story-board.

If the storyteller needs notes to help him recall events in their correct order, he may use the story-map while telling the story.

### 6. Pantomime the Bible Story

Pantomiming is an excellent tool for learning a Bible story without memorizing it. Many storytellers have found that pantomiming the story in private helps them to experience the story with their entire body.

I have been in countries where I did not speak the language. On several occasions I was able to communicate to a salesperson by pantomiming and was able to understand the salesperson who pantomimed to me. To buy eggs, I put my fingers from my two hands together to form an oval shape. Then I put my hands by my side and flapped them as if they were wings, and I clucked like a chicken.

The pantomimic communicates through bodily movement instead of the spoken word. To express by pantomime is to communicate a thought, action, object, or event by means of bodily movements, gestures, facial expressions and attitudes. For example, one

would pantomime the idea of a baby by cradling an imaginary infant.

To pantomime a story, the storyteller practices the story without using his voice. However, he will use the full range of movement allowed by the human body to express each thought, attitude, dialogue, object, and event found in the story.

I suggest that the storyteller pantomime the Bible story in two stages:

1<sup>st</sup> First stage: While reading the story, use gestures and facial expressions to express each sequence of events in the story.

2<sup>nd</sup> Second stage: Remember the details of

the story without memorizing it. At this point, minimize the spoken word by saying few words while concentrating on pantomiming each event and dialogue with gestures and bodily movement.

## **7. Rehearse the story**

Rehearsing the story out loud helps the storyteller know which parts come easily and which need more work. Telling the story out loud helps fix the story in the storyteller's mind and gives him opportunity to work on his voice and gestures.

# TIPS FOR TELLING A BIBLE STORY

## 1. Follow the structural order of the biblical narrative

The storyteller should begin by establishing the initial-situation of the story. The initial-situation introduces the main character who lives in a clearly described time and place. The storyteller should narrate the event that identifies the initial-problem, and then continue telling the story by following the sequence of events in their chronological order.

The storyteller who understands the structure of the story, uses his imagination to experience the story, and makes connections between personal experiences and the biblical events, is prepared to tell the story in a manner in which his listeners will also experience it.

## 2. Making mistakes is a reality

The only places where perfect people exist are in books and films. The reason: mistakes are edited out. In the real world, the Bible storyteller will make mistakes. Those willing to make errors are the only ones who will improve.

The best plan to improve one's ability to tell Bible stories is: practice, practice and practice; the mind will become sharper at remembering details. The one who constantly tells Bible stories will never become perfect; however, he will constantly improve.

## 3. Trust the story

One can never predict the results of a well told story, but the storyteller should expect the results to surprise him with joy.

Telling a Bible story can be compared to the seed Jesus mentioned in some of his parables: they grow when no one is watching, and no one can predict how much each seed will reproduce itself before harvest time.

Storytelling should not be done in the same manner as confrontation evangelization, which seeks an immediate, concrete response. Storytelling is not like planting grass on a lawn; it is more like planting a fruit tree. When you plant grass, the result is immediate and predictable. The grass begins to appear above ground within days, and you will need to mow it within weeks. When you plant a fruit tree, it takes years before it bears fruit. The planter may or may not be the one who will harvest the fruit.

Bible storytelling is a powerful tool. It will produce results; God's Word does not return in vain. A story may produce immediate results in the listeners' lives. Yet, a story may take days, weeks, months or years of stewing in some story-listeners' minds before it produces fruit. Sometimes the storyteller is privileged to be present when the story produces spiritual fruit. Other times, someone else will be present to harvest the concrete results. The storyteller can know that God will harvest the results of a well-told Bible story.

Therefore, trust the Holy Spirit to reap the fruit from the Bible story, but do not pressure the story-listeners for an immediate concrete response.