

# Story telling helps

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Whoever teaches children - whether at home or at Church groups - must speak 'the very words of God' (I Peter 4:11). This should not intimidate us. Rather, it should make us eager to hear the word of God so as to bring this great gift to the children. Here are some pointers to hearing that word and showing it to the children.

## **Find (and then show) the action of God in the passage**

The easiest thing to do is to see the action of man and to make this into a behavioural lesson (this is what to do and this is what to avoid). This is not invalid (Exodus 24:12; Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11) but is not the emphasis of the Bible itself. God is eager that we see his side of the story - his purpose, his joy, his certainty, his saving action, his renewal, his hope and his Son. This is all the more so in the Scriptures which recount the appalling failure of the world or of God's people. God directs us to the covenant he has made with them, the covenant he is keeping, and the covenant he will fulfil. Every action of his has to do with Jesus Christ and him being full of grace and truth. All of the Old Testament prepares for this. All of the New Testament proclaims this.

If the story is the sower and the seed, the main point is not that we should be good soil (though that is true) but that we should hear the word of the kingdom. God had enabled the disciples to hear this word that Jesus had been distributing generously. So, it is good to take notice of the warning about the word being taken away, dried up, or choked by riches and cares, but all the more important to turn to

the Christ whose presence is greater than all these dynamics. As you, the teacher, are now going to freely give the good word of God to the children, trust him for the result! Some will not respond but some will, and there will be a harvest.

If the story is the greatness of David in overcoming his enemies, the main point is not that we should all be brave and have similar victories but that God was the Saviour of his people, anointed David as king and gave him victories. He did this for David because of his purpose to give the world a Saviour. Christ is now our King, and God has given him and gives him victories for us to share. If we wish to follow in David's steps (and we should), then show the children what David believed so that they may have the same faith as him.

### **Find (and show) how the action of God brings us to grace and truth**

The Bible constantly shows people being humbled by the kindness of God. Often times, this is preceded by judgements because they (we) are stubborn, but the end of the story is the triumph of grace in the humbling of a people who delight in God. If the story is Peter's denials, the point is not that we should bravely stand up for Christ (though we should) but that Jesus trained Peter to rely on him instead of bragging about his faithfulness. How strong and gentle Peter was after this! His strength was coming from Christ now. He was a lover of grace, not of himself.

If the story is Ruth, the point is not about Naomi being pleasant (though that seems to be important to the story) or about Ruth's kindness to her mother in law (though Naomi draws attention to this). Rather, the promises of God to Israel gave Naomi a faith that was larger than her personal tragedies. She could speak to her daughters in law of the kindness of God but could also speak of the bitterness God had brought into her life. Ruth met the faithfulness of God in her mother in law and through Israel's provision of a kinsmen/redeemer for widows.

## **Be thankful to God for his action**

Someone has observed that one of the missing ingredients of Western civilisation is a zest that arises from gratefulness. The enthusiasm needed for teaching comes from delight in God's sure action - in the Bible and in life. Don't tell the children to be grateful; just be grateful and lead them in thanksgiving; it is infectious! It may be necessary, occasionally, to warn about ungratefulness, but your own gratefulness is primary.

Stories communicate, so keep attention on the characters, action and outcome

Life itself is a narrative - with many facets and turns. Through Christ, we have been made part of God's story, so, telling Bible stories is not entertainment or an illustration for a moral, it is our own family history. We can tell it with relish, with understanding, with sympathy and without needing to tie off all the ends. If something seems untidy, then our confidence is in the end of God's story, not the resolution of every part of life as it happens.

Happy story time!