

7 Things To NOT Do When Telling a Bible Story

By Timothy Brown

People enjoy hearing and watching stories. That's why television and movies are so popular. Think about how many hours a week you watch TV and the number of times you watch reruns of programs you've already seen. Why? One of the biggest reasons is they tell a story and that captivates your attention.

Now, think about children and their love of stories. As our sons were growing up, there were certain movies they could quote large portions of because they had seen them so many times. That love of hearing stories is a great benefit to Bible teachers. The Bible is full of fantastic stories that children love to hear over and over; if they're done right. This article will focus on 7 things you should NOT do if you want your stories to be effective.

Don't be unprepared and unorganized when it comes time to tell your story. If you are trying to "wing" it, the children will catch on real quick and you'll lose their attention. When telling a Bible story, I have an outline in my Bible as a guide, but know the story well enough to teach without it. That way, my focus is on the children and I can make eye contact with each one during the course of the story. A day or two before your class, practice telling the story out loud with whatever visuals you will use. That will help you prepare and will give you a rough estimate of how long your story will actually take.

Don't give a dull and lifeless presentation. I remember hearing a noted communicator say once that it's a sin to bore a child with the Word of God. I agree. The stories in the Bible are exciting and full of action. Enthusiasm is contagious whether it's a quiet non-animated type or an active and outgoing excitement. When preparing the story, put yourself in the character's place. Think about what they felt and did. Live the story in your preparation and then present it that way.

Don't simply read the story, but tell it. There are times when it's good to read the story to the children on occasion, but most of the time you should tell it. As you prepare, look at some of the actions you can bring into your story. When David is whirling the sling and getting ready to throw the stone, whirl your arm in a similar manner. When Gideon's men kneel down to take a drink of water, kneel down in a similar fashion. By telling the story, you can act out parts and maintain eye contact.

Don't give a mechanical presentation from a memorized script. Some people have great memories and simply memorize the story and repeat it. The problem with that is the story often comes from the head and not the heart. It's also not your story; you're simply parroting someone else's story. I'd rather memorize an outline of the story and fill in the details as I tell it.

Don't use language that the children in your class don't understand. If you use a lot of words the children don't understand, you'll lose their attention. I have a friend who is a computer genius, but when he talks computers he uses words and phrases he understands but I don't have a clue about. It only takes a couple of minutes and I give up trying to follow him.

This also applies to words we use often in Christian circles like justification, grace, mercy, redemption, sanctification, etc. It's easy to assume that children know what these words mean, but quite often they don't. When they hear the word grace, they may think about saying grace before a meal. You can and maybe should use these words, but when you do, explain them.

Don't include so many details that you drag out the story and hide the message. The Bible gives a fairly in depth description of Goliath and his armor, but if you give a ten-minute telling of all the details, the children are likely to get bored and it will take time away from more important items. Give enough of a description so the children can visualize how big he was, but not so many that they get bored.

Don't be too dependent on your notes or visuals. I've seen some people tell a Bible story using a series of flash card pictures; but they told it to the cards and not the children. Their whole attention was on the cards and very seldom did they look at the children. Notes and visuals are tools to help you convey your message. If you spend most of your time looking at your notes, you won't make eye contact with the children. If your story is heavily dependent on visuals, what happens if you forget them or something happens to them?

The bottom line in story telling is to know your material and be excited about it. If you are excited, it will carry over to the children. Next time you watch your favorite TV program take note of the things they don't do that makes the story more interesting and exciting. Examine your storytelling methods and see if you include any of these things you should not do. If you find yourself doing any of them, start targeting them one at a time to stop them and see what improvements it makes in your stories.