

36 Ready-to-Read
Assemblies for
Collective
Worship

**Taking your school through
the Bible story in a year**

Helen Lings



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Contents

Introduction	7
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Autumn term

Week 1: God is in all our times	10
Everything has its time (Ecclesiastes 3)	
Week 2: God intends us to be here	12
God creates humans (Genesis 2)	
Week 3: Humans choose to do as they please	14
The fall (Genesis 2 and 3)	
Week 4: What happens when humans do as they please.....	16
The first murder (Genesis 4)	
Week 5: God punishes, but promises to preserve life	18
The flood (Genesis 6—9)	
Week 6: God gives humans rules to live by.....	20
The ten commandments (Exodus 20)	
Week 7: God's followers find that he is reliable	22
David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17)	
Week 8: God's care for humans	24
The Lord is my shepherd (Psalm 23)	
Week 9: Humans fail to live up to God's standards.....	26
A call for justice (Amos 5 and 6)	
Week 10: God promises to send help.....	28
A new, just leader is promised (Isaiah 7 and 9)	
Week 11: God's final rescue plan.....	30
The annunciation (Luke 1)	
Week 12: God comes to be with humans.....	32
The birth of Jesus (Luke 2)	

Spring term

Week 1: Jesus' birth brings recognition and conflict.....	36
The visit of the wise men (Matthew 2)	
Week 2: Jesus hears who he really is.....	38
Jesus is baptised (Matthew 3)	
Week 3: Jesus refuses to misuse his power	40
Jesus is tempted (Luke 4)	
Week 4: Jesus chooses people to help him	42
Calling the first disciples (Luke 5)	
Week 5: Jesus gets to work and heals.....	44
A paralysed man is healed (Luke 5)	

Week 6: Jesus teaches 'Love your neighbour'	46
The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10)	
Week 7: Jesus teaches about forgiveness	48
The parable of the lost son (Luke 15)	
Week 8: Jesus teaches responsibility for those in need.....	50
The parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25)	
Week 9: Jesus explains his death	52
The last supper (Matthew 26)	
Week 10: Jesus' enemies take him.....	54
Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26)	
Week 11: Jesus is put on trial.....	56
Jesus' trial before Pilate (Matthew 27)	
Week 12: Jesus dies.....	58
The crucifixion (Luke 23)	

Summer term

Week 1: God shows his power over death	62
The resurrection (John 20)	
Week 2: God's Son's time on earth ends	64
The ascension (Acts 1)	
Week 3: God's power comes to his followers.....	66
Pentecost (Acts 2)	
Week 4: The first Christians believe.....	68
Peter's speech to Jerusalem's people (Acts 2)	
Week 5: Peter acts in the Holy Spirit's power.....	70
The healing of a lame man (Acts 3)	
Week 6: Boldness leads to trouble.....	72
The death of Stephen (Acts 7)	
Week 7: An enemy becomes a disciple	74
The conversion of Saul (Acts 9)	
Week 8: Paul explains his Christian faith.....	76
Peace with God (Romans 5)	
Week 9: Paul explains the heart of following Jesus.....	78
Love is the greatest gift (1 Corinthians 13)	
Week 10: Watch your words.....	80
The danger of words (James 3)	
Week 11: John sees the end of time.....	82
A new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 7 and 21)	
Week 12: God's ongoing commitment to us	84
Can anything separate us from the love of God? (Romans 8)	
Appendix	87

Introduction: How to use this book

This book is intended as a resource for the hard-pushed assembly leader, perhaps most obviously in a school with a Christian foundation or tradition, who wants to familiarise pupils with the Christian story through a once-a-week assembly, using well-known Bible passages. These passages are also foundational to an understanding of biblical and Christian allusions in our literature, arts and current affairs broadcasting. (For example, a phrase such as 'a flood of biblical proportions' might be used, or an FA Cup match could be called a 'David and Goliath' encounter.) The assembly leader should be able to take this book from the shelf and read it without preparation, when necessary.

The structure

The material covers 36 weeks in total, divided into twelve-week autumn, spring and summer terms. It can also be divided across six shorter terms very easily.

The readings

These 36 well-known Bible passages take the story from creation through to the end of time. They have been abridged carefully, so that they are mostly around 200 words in length but will still read fluently. There is a choice in each assembly between the Authorised (King James) Version (KJV), for its familiar poetry and its place in our language and culture, and *THE MESSAGE*, for its contemporary, streetwise appeal. Occasionally the New International Version (NIV) has been used in place of the King James Bible, if the latter's vocabulary is too opaque for children, and an appendix of all readings given in the New International Version is included for those who would prefer to use this version consistently. Similarly, the Contemporary English Version (CEV) is sometimes used instead of *THE MESSAGE* if the latter is too much of a paraphrase. The assembly leader can confidently choose between versions, as the same biblical material is covered, and will find themselves reading either from the left-hand or the right-hand side of the double-page spread, as each 'option', whether traditional or contemporary, is complete in itself.

Some familiar Old Testament stories, particularly about the patriarchs, have been omitted. Generally, this is because their construction is so long that they cannot be abridged to an appropriate length while remaining comprehensible and coherent.

Also, the place of Christmas at the end of the first term of the school year brings us to the New Testament very quickly. This is all to the good, for *36 Ready-to-Read Assemblies* is designed primarily as a Christian resource, rather than as a children's Bible that aims to mirror the balance of Old to New Testament stories.

The prayers

Similarly, a choice of two prayers is offered for each assembly. One is drawn from the body of traditional prayers that have entered the Christian faith from the pens of the great saints through the ages. These prayers have poetic balance and appeal to some pupils because of this quality. I have written the contemporary prayer options to reflect the message of the assembly in everyday words.

Certain prayers may appear more than once (for example, the Lord's Prayer appears once in each term) and may become familiar and favourite prayers as a result.

The thought for the day

Again, this gives the leader a choice. By following the 'Text' sections, you can simply read my explanation of the Bible story's meaning, with some relevant application to the pupils' lives. Alternatively, by including the 'Instruction' sections, you can also engage the pupils in question-and-answer activities, and in quiet reflection. Insights have been drawn here from the spirituality and Godly Play traditions. No visual aids, materials or ICT are required for these talks, so they truly can be used without preparation.

The song suggestion

For the sake of completeness, I have offered a song suggestion that will reflect the Bible story or theme of the talk, but each school will have its own song traditions and may prefer to make its own choices.

What about subsequent years?

The book is designed to be read through each academic year. That way, a child in Key Stage 2 will hear these passages four times in their school life, and so will be familiar with them by the time they leave the school. There is comfort in hearing the familiar, and it becomes internalised.

Assembly leaders can develop the 'instructions' part of the talks by introducing their own resources, stories and questions as they become familiar with the texts over the years.

Autumn term

Autumn

Week 10

God promises to send help

Traditional option

Bible reading: A new, just leader is promised

And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good...

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined...

For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder...

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

ISAIAH 7:13-15; 9:2, 4, 6-7 (KJV)

Thought for the day

Instruction: *Ask the pupils to think of the superheroes that films are made about and give you examples of them. Ask what these superheroes have in common, leading to the conclusion that they all fight an evil force that is threatening people's lives, and make things better.*

Text: If you remember last week's reading, you will recall that things were not good in the land of Israel. The ten commandments weren't being kept. Especially, the poorest people were being robbed and even killed by the rich, and there was no justice, or fairness, when people went to court about it. The prophets, who spoke for God, warned that the country would be overrun by invading enemies because it was so bad.

But then, in all this fear and darkness, the prophet Isaiah saw another future. He said that God would send a new leader, a baby born into a royal household. This leader would be different: he would be honest and fair and defend the weak against the powerful. He would be like a light shining in a dark night when you are afraid.

Instruction: *Ask the pupils to think (but not to give answers) about whether they were ever promised something that they really wanted or needed, but then they had to wait a long time for it—so long that they almost forgot that it had been promised or that they wanted it.*

Text: New children were born into the palace; some of them became good, just rulers, while others were proud and unkind. With each new start, the people's hopes rose, and then disappointment set in, especially as powerful nations all around Israel began to attack, invade and capture the people of the land. 'Where is this new David-like leader who will solve all our problems?' they asked.

They were in for an 800-year-long wait! But God hadn't forgotten his promise; the time was just not yet right. They had to wait until Jesus was born. In our lives, too, sometimes we want something now, urgently, but now would not be the best time. When it does happen, we can see that the waiting time was right, and be glad.

Learning to wait and be patient is really hard for us, but Christians believe that it helps us to grow in character. God does not forget us, and he wants us to keep asking him to give us the good things that we need. They are not always what we want, which is different! I may want a million pounds now, but I may not need it, and it might not be good for me.

Song suggestion

- O come, O come, Emmanuel (from the 'Great O Antiphons', trans. John Mason Neale)

Prayer

**Grant me, O Lord, to know what is worth knowing,
To love what is worth loving,
To praise what delights you most,
To value what is precious in your sight,
To hate what is offensive to you,
To judge rightly between things that differ,
And above all to search out and to do
what pleases you.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

THOMAS À KEMPIS (1380-1471)

God promises to send help

Contemporary option

Bible reading: A new, just leader is promised

Then listen to this, government of David! It's bad enough that you make people tired with your pious, timid hypocrisies, but now you're making God tired. So the Master is going to give you a sign anyway. Watch for this: A girl who is presently a virgin will get pregnant. She'll bear a son and name him Immanuel (God-With-Us). By the time the child is twelve years old, [he will be] able to make moral decisions...

But there'll be no darkness for those who were in trouble...

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. For those who lived in a land of deep shadows—light! sunbursts of light!...

Oh, they're so glad in your presence! Festival joy!...

The abuse of oppressors and cruelty of tyrants—all their whips and cudgels and curses—is gone...

For a child has been born—for us! the gift of a son—for us! He'll take over the running of the world. His names will be: Amazing Counsellor, Strong God, Eternal Father, Prince of Wholeness. His ruling authority will grow, and there'll be no limits to the wholeness he brings. He'll rule from the historic David throne over that promised kingdom. He'll put that kingdom on a firm footing and keep it going with fair dealing and right living, beginning now and lasting always. The zeal of God-of-the-Angel-Armies will do all this.

ISAIAH 7:13–15; 9:1–2, 4, 6–7 (THE MESSAGE)

Thought for the day

Instruction: Ask the pupils to think of the superheroes that films are made about and give you examples of them. Ask what these superheroes have in common, leading to the conclusion that they all fight an evil force that is threatening people's lives, and make things better.

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Text: New children were born into the palace; some of them became good, just rulers, while others were proud and unkind. With each new start, the people's hopes rose, and then disappointment set in, especially as powerful nations all around Israel began to attack, invade and capture the people of the land. 'Where is this new David-like leader who will solve all our problems?' they asked.

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Learning to wait and be patient is really hard for us, but Christians believe that it helps us to grow in character. God does not forget us, and he wants us to keep asking him to give us the good things that we need. They are not always what we want, which is different! I may want a million pounds now, but I may not need it, and it might not be good for me.

Song suggestion

- O come, O come, Emmanuel (from the 'Great O Antiphons', trans. John Mason Neale)

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for caring when things are not going well for us, and for having a rescue plan when things go wrong. Please help us to learn to tell you about our problems and to trust you for good solutions. Amen

Spring

Week 7

Jesus teaches about forgiveness

Traditional option

Bible reading: The parable of the lost son

Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them.

'Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs...

'When he came to his senses, he said, "... I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." So he got up and went to his father.

'But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him.

'The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

'But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.'

LUKE 15:11-15, 17-24 (NIV)

Thought for the day

Instruction: *Ask the pupils to reflect, in silence, on whether they have ever done something that they really wished they hadn't done, because it hurt someone else.*

Text: In Jesus' story, a young man went off with half his father's money, and wasted it on partying. After the money had run out, and he was earning a few pence feeding pigs, he realised how stupid he was and how hurtful his behaviour had been to his father. He decided to go home and ask his father to take him back and let him pay his way by working for him. But he hadn't reckoned with his father's love for him.

The fact that his father saw him coming suggests that he had been on the lookout for his son. The father ran to him, hugged him (pig-dirt and all), and gave him fresh clothes and a party. He had feared

that the young man was dead; his great love for his son enabled him to forgive the past and put everything right between them.

Jesus said a lot about forgiveness. He didn't tell us to forget the wrong that people do to us; it is real and hurtful. But he told us to put it behind us, as this father did in the story, so that our relationships can be mended.

As we saw last week, too, Jesus said some extraordinary, upside-down things. He said, 'If your enemy hits you on the right cheek, then offer him the left one to strike as well,' whereas we would say, 'If your enemy hits you, hit him back!' In the Lord's Prayer he taught us to say to God, 'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.' Jesus knew that God will forgive us for the wrong we do towards him. By forgiving us, God frees us to forgive each other, deeply and lastingly. Then people can live in peace together.

Instruction: *If appropriate, say, 'At the start, I asked if you have something you regret doing. Remember, God loves you as much as this father loved his son, and you can be forgiven if you really say sorry.*

'Now, though, I want you to think about the other side of forgiveness. Is there a bit of you that has been hurt by someone else, and you hate them for it? What they did may truly be wrong, and you are not expected to say that wrong is right; indeed, you may need to tell a trusted adult about it, so that they can help you. But to keep yourself from being more badly hurt inside, perhaps the time has come to forgive the other person—which means to begin to want the best for them in their lives, rather than wanting bad for them and planning revenge. It's a very hard thing to do, but worth it, as this story shows.'

Song suggestion

- I'm accepted, I'm forgiven (Rob Hayward)

Prayer

***Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.***

THE LORD'S PRAYER, BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

Jesus teaches about forgiveness

Contemporary option

Bible reading: The parable of the lost son

Then he said, 'There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, I want right now what's coming to me."

'So the father divided the property between them. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs...

'That brought him to his senses. He said, "... I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand." He got right up and went home to his father.

'When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: "Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again."

'But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, "Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!" And they began to have a wonderful time.'

LUKE 15:11–15, 17–24 (THE MESSAGE)

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Song suggestion

- I'm accepted, I'm forgiven (Rob Hayward)

Prayer

Dear Father God, thank you for being willing to forgive us for the wrong things we do. As you forgive us, help us to forgive those who hurt us and to want good things for them, rather than bad things. Amen